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volume 28
annual issue 2013/14



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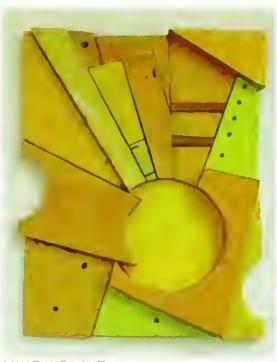
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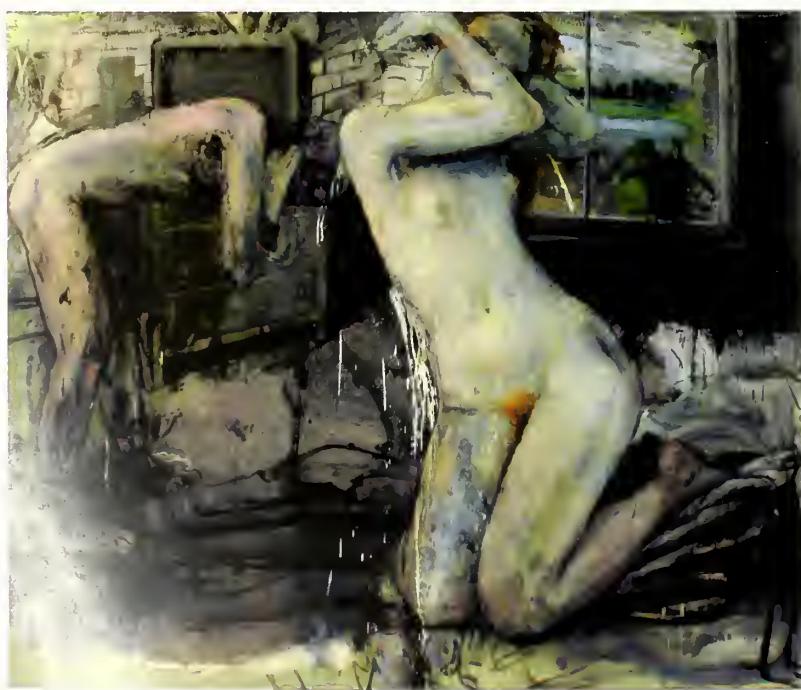
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TRURO (BLUE & YELLOW), 2012 20 X 26 INCHES OIL ON LINEN \$7,000

Mitchell Johnson

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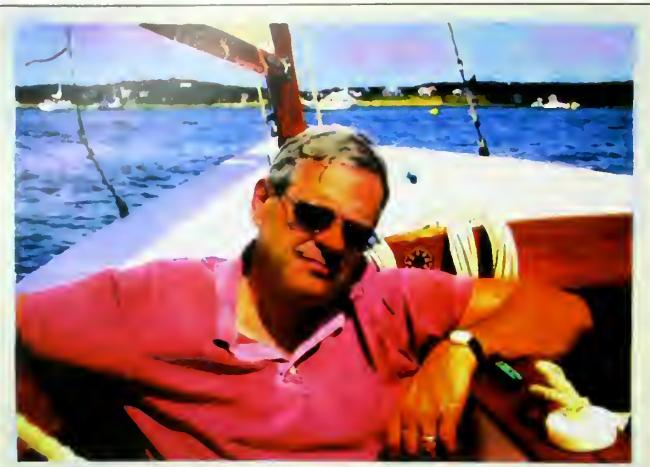


TRURO (MIRANDA), 2012 22 X 30 INCHES OIL ON LINEN \$7,500

Mitchell Johnson's paintings have appeared in *ARTnews*, *Art in America*, the *New York Times Magazine*, *American Artist*, *Oprah's Next Chapter*, *The Mindy Project*, *Southwest Art*, *San Francisco Magazine*, *Provincetown Arts*, *Modern Painters*, *Art Ltd.*, *Cape Arts Review*, *Sunset Magazine*, *Gentry*, *The Huffington Post*, *American Contemporary Art*, and many feature films including *The Holiday* (2006), *It's Complicated* (2009), *The Lodger* (2009), and *Crazy Stupid Love* (2011). New monograph, *Mitchell Johnson: Color as Content*, available September 2013.

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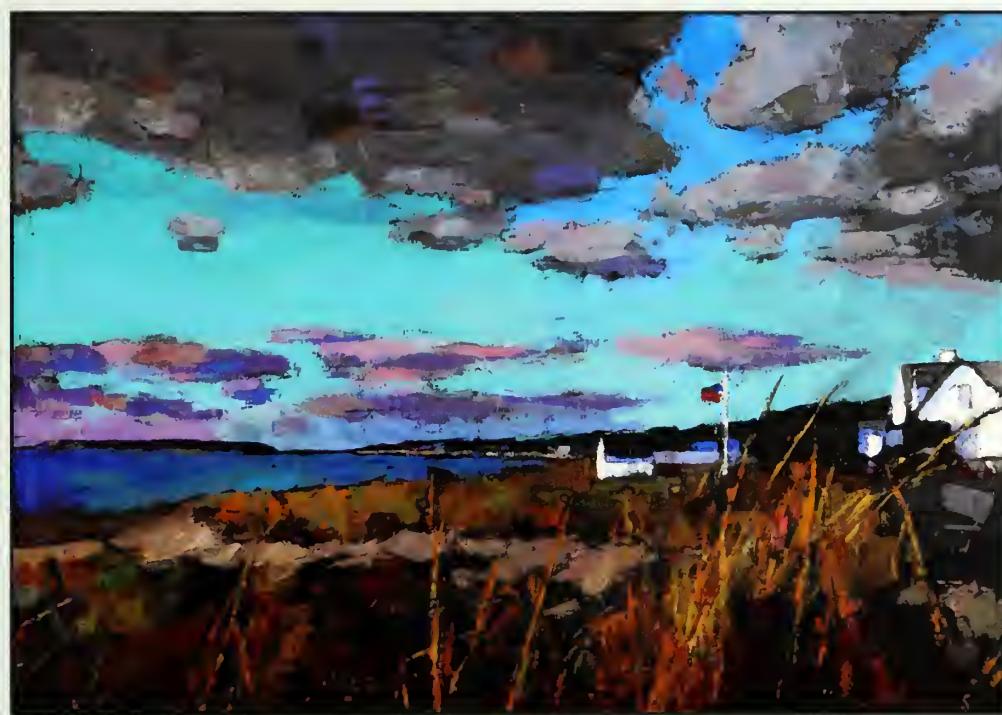
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May 24–July 7

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Preview: May 31–June 15



Elspeth Halvorsen

Art of the Garden
June 7–July 21



Jim Peters

Collection
June 21–July 14

Jim Peters
June 28–August 11

James Balla
June 28–August 11

Members 12 x 12
July 12–September 7

Pioneers from Provincetown
July 19–September 2

Collection
July 26–August 25

Abstract Marriage:
Sculpture by Ilya and Resia Schor
August 16–September 29



Ilya Schor

Resia Schor

Auction: September 21
Preview: September 6–21

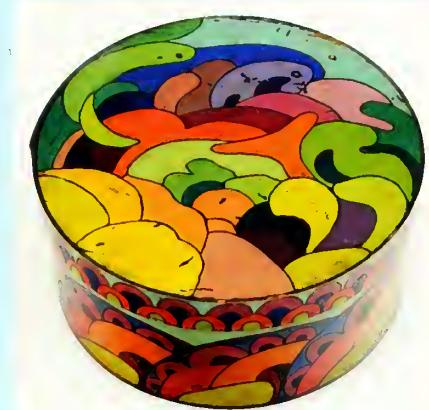


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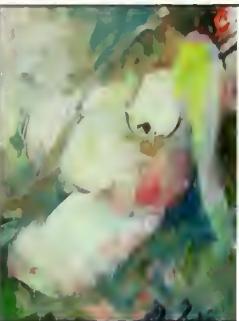
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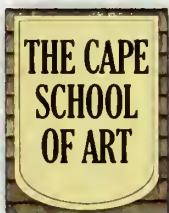


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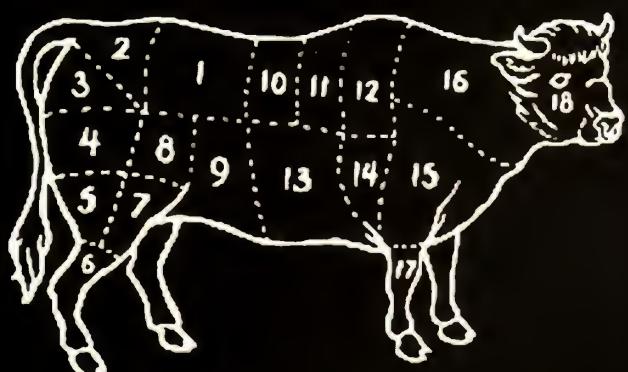
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1994	EDITOR'S CHOICE IV: ESSAYS FROM THE U.S. SMALL PRESS 1978-92
1994	NOTABLE ESSAYS OF 1993
1993	AMERICAN LITERARY MAGAZINE AWARDS: FIRST PLACE FOR EDITORIAL CONTENT
1993	BEST AMERICAN POETRY
1993	PUSHCART PRIZE XVIII: BEST OF THE SMALL PRESSES
1992	AMERICAN LITERARY MAGAZINE AWARDS: FIRST PLACE FOR EDITORIAL CONTENT & DESIGN
1991	BEST AMERICAN POETRY
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Letter from the Editor

As I read through this year's issue of *Provincetown Arts*, I'm struck by the many circles of families. In our feature on the painter Anne Packard, we are introduced to her two daughters, Cynthia and Leslie, also painters, with a further profile highlighting Cynthia's work. In the article that follows, we read about the work of artist Elspeth Halvorsen and her rich family life with her husband, artist Tony Vevers, and her daughters, Stephanie and Tabitha. Susan Bee has written about the extraordinary work of her mother, painter Miriam Laufer. Elizabeth Mailer shares an excerpt from her forthcoming memoir, which recalls a time when she discussed writing with her iconic father, Norman Mailer. In the book review section, we learn about the life of a Provincetown fishing family in *Nautical Twilight*, a memoir written by Judith Dutra.

So many families. All sorts of families. Two articles introduce us to groups of fellows—visual artists and writers who live, work, and create together, forming bonds that inspire and endure—at Provincetown's Mailer Center and at the Fine Arts Work Center, which is also profiled by Roger Skillings in another installment of his ongoing history of this vital institution.

We meet families who adapt and transform as they travel to new homes, new countries—much like the population of P-town, with its mix of Portuguese immigrants, fishing families, artists, and washashores, all thriving against the backdrop of creative energy and Cape light.

I was also struck this year by some lines in an essay by Indira Ganesan, who discusses the artistry and emotional compass in the writing of Jhumpa Lahiri, our second featured artist in this issue:

"The immigrant's walk is the walk away from home, the impulse to leave what is both familiar and understood behind. The immigrant's knowledge of home is intrinsic, psychic, below the surface. . . . The immigrant moves toward the unknown. The walk becomes akin to the gambler's hope for another chance. It is the notion that physical distance will create a transformation, a way not only to escape but also to construct a new persona, as well as more possibilities."

In Anne Packard's paintings, we savor the horizon above the ocean. It is a unique vista that beckons, challenges, comforts. It promises new beginnings, a new life. But where does this journey end? In the lonely cadences captured in Packard's delineations of sky and sea and shore? In the breakwaters and lowlands and shorelines of Lahiri's extraordinary renderings of place, which make us question the very meaning of "foreign" and how it applies to the human heart? Each painting, each story marks the beginning of a journey, with travels spanning miles and cultures and years, moving inevitably toward revelation and hope.

To continue with the quote from Ganesan's essay: "It is as if one wants to cut off one's shadow when one moves, but shadows always follow. The remedy, however momentary, is love."

Each artist emerges from shadow and blazes a new trail. Each new generation navigates toward a unique understanding of home. And our families, all sorts of families, are the guides who show us the way.



A handwritten signature of the name "Susanna" in cursive script.

Susanna Ralli
Senior Editor

PROVINCETOWN ARTS 2013

ON THE COVER

Jhumpa Lahiri, photograph by Liana Miuccio

Anne Packard, photograph by Phil Smith

Anne Packard, *Red Dory* (detail), 2003, oil on canvas, 25 by 32 inches COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING

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For One Thing She Did

Lise Brody

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PROVINCETOWN ARTS

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Published annually in midsummer since 1985, *Provincetown Arts* focuses broadly on artists, performers, and writers who inhabit or visit the tip of Cape Cod, and seeks to stimulate creative activity and enhance public awareness of the cultural life of the nation's oldest continuous artists' colony. Drawing upon a century-long tradition rich in art, theater, and writing, *Provincetown Arts* publishes essays, fiction, interviews, journals, performance pieces, poetry, profiles, reporting, reviews, and visual features, with a view toward demonstrating that a community of artists, functioning outside the urban centers, is a utopian dream with an ongoing vitality.

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ARTISTS

JAMES BENNETT and **DAVID COWAN**, owners of ACME Fine Art in Boston, where they have actively been enhancing the reputation of historically important Provincetown artists, announced they are moving from their location on Newbury Street to the South End's burgeoning gallery district along Harrison Avenue. ACME has been active in bringing to Boston awareness of the art scene of Provincetown, much in the manner of New York galleries fostering the artists who summered in East Hampton during the heyday of Abstract Expressionism.

STEVE BOWERSOCK, an artist with an eponymous art gallery, not uncommon in Provincetown, has produced innovative work year after year, developing and honing his understanding of what he is after. His new paintings, *Haunted by Dreams*, on view at Bowersock Gallery, show a Surrealist swerve that heightens his imagery into poetic resonance, in which a man uses an umbrella to conjure a storm.

DIDIER CORALLO's light-transmitting sculptures, shown last spring in an eye-expanding exhibition at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum (PAAM), remain active in our memory for their conceptual originality and their optical inventions. Using glass, Plexiglas, Pyrex test tubes, mirrors, magnifying glass, and opaque and translucent layering and sandwiching of multiple planes, Corallo creates an environmental experience that suggests casual understanding of the deep aesthetics of science. Examples of his work may be seen this summer at Gallery Ehva.

JAY CRITCHLEY's performance-based projects include the annual Re-Rooters Day Ceremony, held every January now for thirty seasons. In a bizarre costume, wearing boots and tethering a small makeshift pram with a discarded Christmas tree for its passenger, Jay leads a crowd in chants along the chilly shoreline of the bay. Then Jay lights the turpentine-soaked tree, the dazzle of fire reflecting in the water. After the ceremony this year, Critchley flew across the pond to spend a month-long residency at Fundación Valparaíso in Mojácar, Spain—a white-cubed village on the side of a mountain overlooking the Mediterranean and settled by the North African Islamic Moors in the eighth century. The next month he spent at CAMAC, an artists' residency an hour outside Paris and close by Nogent-sur-Seine's enormous nuclear power plant. Critchley produced about fifty works on paper for a book he is creating titled *HIV: Matisse Cuts It Out*, inspired by the Matisse scissor-snipped collages in his book *Jazz*. Critchley had begun this project twenty years ago, but didn't return to it until now, creating rituals for the power of art to heal, using cultural references in ads from the *New York Times* and issues of *Paris Match* from the 1990s, found at the French residence, the very years in which he had begun the project.

GRACE HOPKINS, the daughter of the famed Long Point artist Budd Hopkins and the art historian April Kingsley, and the author of *The Turning Point: Abstract Expressionism and the Transformation of American Art*, is the new director of artSTRAND gallery, which is housed in the buzzing Schoolhouse building, headquarters for the community radio station WOMR FM 92.1. Grace's parents, both frequent contributors to *Provincetown Arts*, passed on to us valuable historical memory, infusing our current energy, so in keeping with the manner of a community regenerating itself.

JON FRIEDMAN's telling portrait of Massachusetts congressman Barney Frank was hung in the House Banking and Finance Committee hearing room on June 25. Frank, wanting to be frank, requested that several items surround him in the painting. The first member of Congress to voluntarily come out as gay, he later married his partner, becoming the first member of Congress to marry someone of the same sex while in office. In Friedman's portrait, Frank is wearing his wedding ring. He was one of the most powerful members of Congress, perhaps because he was one of the smartest, wittiest, and most eloquent politicians on Capitol Hill. The two volumes of the Congressional Directory encompass the years that Frank served in the House, 1981–2012.

EDWARD HOPPER's love life is known to be as spare as the low light cast across his somber settings, but the new book *My Dear Mr. Hopper* (Yale University Press, 2013), edited by Elizabeth Thompson Colleary, reads like a Victorian novella showing the restrained desire of the great painter during his formative years in Paris, where he met a bewitching Norwegian-American from Minnesota named Alta Hilsdale. Hopper saw her in Paris for long periods over a decade, and the book



Didier Corallo, *Colony*, installed at PAAM



Grace Hopkins, artSTRAND Director

Jay Critchley at the Re-Rooters Day Ceremony, 2013



Steve Bowersock, *Breaking Through the Storm*, 2013

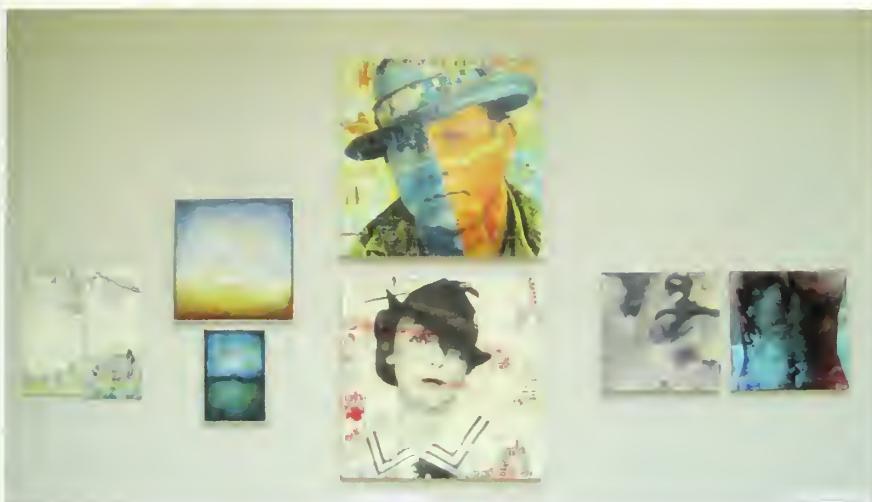


Tabitha Vevers, *Lover's Eye (after Jack Pierson)*, 2013



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View of *Swept Away: Translucence, Transparency and Transcendence in Contemporary Encaustic*
CAPE COD MUSEUM OF ART PHOTO BY JOANNE MATTERA

consists of more than fifty letters describing, mostly, her efforts to encourage and discourage Mr. Hopper's affections, and offering insights into paintings made during the period. This book might dispel the myth of Hopper's reclusive nature, since the couple enjoys dinners, lectures, theaters, concerts, and promenades in parks. Hopper is painfully stricken when she announces she intends to marry another man. His painting *Soir Bleu*, according to the book's introduction, "can be seen as capturing the immediacy of Hopper's despondency."

JOANNE MATTERA, author of *The Art of Encaustic Painting*, is the founder and director of the Seventh International Encaustic Conference and Exhibitions, which took place May 31-June 2 at the Truro Center for the Arts at Castle Hill and the Provincetown Inn, along with exhibitions in Provincetown, Truro, Wellfleet, and Dennis.

CLAES OLDENBURG spent the summer of 1960 in Provincetown constructing "flags" from scraps of wood found while beachcombing. He was finding a way to conflate painting with sculpture, "to return painting to the tangible object." A recent show at MoMA features *Provincetown Flag* (1960), which draws on the cultural significance of Provincetown as the first landing place of the Pilgrims. Oldenburg describes these assemblages in his notes as "souvenirs of a town so focused on the commercialization of patriotism and history."

MARY SHERMAN is a Boston artist and writer who has fostered the TransCultural Exchange, inviting artists from other countries to join in a cultural exchange with Boston audiences and artists, which will present its fourth biennial Conference on International Opportunities in the Arts, holding panels and discussions October 10-13 at Boston University, Harvard, MIT, and the Boston Center for the Arts. She is receiving funding from the NEA to expand local horizons around the globe and across disciplines. This year's keynote speaker is Laurie Anderson.

MIRA SCHOR is the curator of *Abstract Marriage: Sculpture by Ilya Schor and Resia Schor*, an exhibition this summer at PAAM that is the crystal model of the phoenix-like power of Provincetown to renew itself through successive generations. This exhibition of the jewel-like work of Ilya and Resia Schor reflects the artists' modesty, passionate precision, and a humble approach to the making of mostly small works. Resia Schor picked up her husband's tools after his early death, and this exhibition is a moving instance of why some people are born to make art. Mira will be having a show this August at artSTRAND gallery.

HOUGHTON CRANFORD SMITH, who studied with Charles Hawthorne and Ambrose Webster early in the twentieth century, became noted for his brand of "Purist Landscapes," a variation on Cubism, crisply indited and calmly composed. His heirs have gifted more than a hundred paintings, drawings, and prints to PAAM, where they were on exhibit this spring.

JOAN SNYDER will occupy the annual Joyce Johnson Chair at the Truro Center for the Arts at Castle Hill, teaching a week-long



Houghton Cranford Smith, *Tree, Figures, and Boats*, c. 1908-11



Abstract Marriage: (left) Resia Schor, *Untitled (Blue Abstraction)*, 1981; (right) Ilya Schor, *Warrior*, 1959-60



Claes Oldenburg, *Provincetown Flag*, 1960
COLLECTION DOUGLAS BAXTER



Jon Friedman, *Barney Frank*, 2013

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painting workshop September 2–6. A recipient of a MacArthur “Genius Grant” for her esteemed career, she has taught previous workshops at Castle Hill, each a new way of revealing the process of how a painting is made, how areas scraped away are restored in echoes and ghosts hidden beneath the surface. A lot of talking and thinking takes place as Snyder circulates among students, asking questions, offering observations, or making a mark to show what she means. She shows others how to know when their paintings are finished.

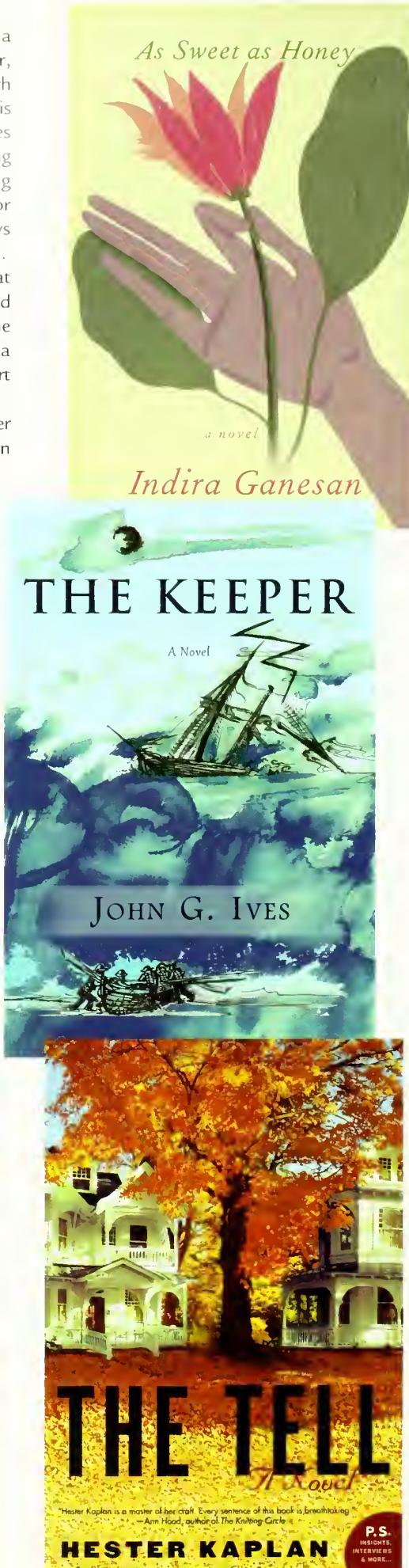
TABITHA VEVERS has just had her first solo show at Lori Bookstein Fine Art in New York City, which featured her *Lover's Eyes* series of paintings. Look for more of the “Eyes” this summer at Albert Merola Gallery and in a show on the history of portraiture at the Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University in early 2014.

MURRAY ZIMILES, nephew of Boris Margo, a father of Surrealism, has been summering in Provincetown since he was a baby, spending weeks on the rolling dunes in a shack on the back shore. In anticipation of his show this summer at the Berta Walker Gallery, he writes, “Although much of the context of my paintings derives from an inner vision and relates to my Hudson River surroundings and perhaps the Hudson River Landscape School, I did drink in the waters of wide and wild vistas while, as a boy, I lived in and helped build the shack known as ‘Margo-Gelb.’ I absorbed the space, the light, and the feel of the Cape’s undulating landscape, all detectable in my recent paintings.”

WRITERS

NICK FLYNN, author of the poetry collection *The Captain Asks for a Show of Hands* (Graywolf, 2011), which was reviewed in these pages in 2011, has finished a new poem, “harbor (the conversion),” that reflects his work with photographer Mischa Richter. Flynn has noted that the poem is “a collaboration with . . . a friend who I’ve been collaborating with for the past few years, often by writing poems in response to his photographs and films of Provincetown, which is his home and my adopted home (or one of them)—Mischa sent me his photograph, which is a still of a short film he made of a local pal, Paul Tasha, riding one of his horses in the bay, while leading another horse beside them. I combined this image with Caravaggio’s great painting *Saul’s Conversion on the Road to Damascus*, which always reminds me of Paul.” The second stanza reads: “Saul was a sailor on the boat to Damascus / He did not know what he was / Paul turned to a voice it rose up from the waves / It chained his boat to the darkness.”

INDIRA GANESAN, born in India and raised in America, was twice a Fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, from 1984 to 1986, honing her skills as a richly evocative storyteller. Her newest novel, *As Sweet as Honey*, is set in contrasting cultural climates—the idyllic, slow-moving fictional island of Pi, “the tiniest crescent-shaped bindi above the eyebrows to Sri Lanka’s tear,” and grim, gray, chilly London. The heroine, Meterling, an extravagant woman from the island, is torn between Eastern and Western ideas



of duty and family, and ultimately finds love in the unlikely shape of a short, round English gentleman. The events that follow, filled with celebration and pain, are soothed by the remarkable support of Meterling’s sophisticated and charming extended family, whose children, making sense of adult dilemmas, ask the most riveting questions.

JOHN IVES is an entertainment attorney and film-business veteran who has also just completed his first novel, *The Keeper*. He is the author of *John Waters (American Originals)*, an interview book with the famous director, whom he met while running the Movies at Whaler’s Wharf in the ’70s. *The Keeper*, historical fiction set in Provincetown in 1900, tells the story of a young New Yorker who joins the US Life-Saving Service at Peaked Hill Bars, rescuing ships run aground in the bitter winter storms. The book is being published by Bohème, the new company started by John and his daughter Justine, who has designed the book and its cover. John lives in Truro with his wife, Kina Bénil, who owns Maison Décor Gallery in Provincetown.

HESTER KAPLAN’s new novel, *The Tell* (Harper Perennial, 2013), offers a compelling psychological portrait of a couple whose enduring marriage is challenged when a television personality moves in next door. The husband, Owen, who has watched reruns of the actor’s entire series of sitcoms, bonds with him instantly during their first shared dinner. The wife, Mira, is also charmed, escaping to casinos with this man with an empty, “as-if” adopted character and little true sense of self. Kaplan is the daughter of Justin Kaplan, the biographer of Samuel Clemens and Walt Whitman, and Anne Bernays, the novelist who appeared on our cover in 2010. As a child, hiding under the table at dinner parties, she listened as her parents and their writer friends spoke of characters in books as if they were real people. If she later asked why a writer was buoyant one week and despairing the next, her parents would explain, “His writing isn’t going well.”

J. MICHAEL LENNON’s eagerly awaited biography *Norman Mailer: A Double Life* will be published in October by Simon & Schuster. Mailer has twice appeared on the cover of *Provincetown Arts* and has been featured many times, which documents his connection to a town where he wrote most of the first draft of *The Naked and the Dead* and later large parts of almost all his books until he died in 2007. Lennon—quoting Mailer as saying that a novelist is the “galley slave” to his imagination—remarks that the “metaphor might lead us to conclude that a biographer is the indentured servant to his sources.” But, like the novelist, the biographer, “must leave

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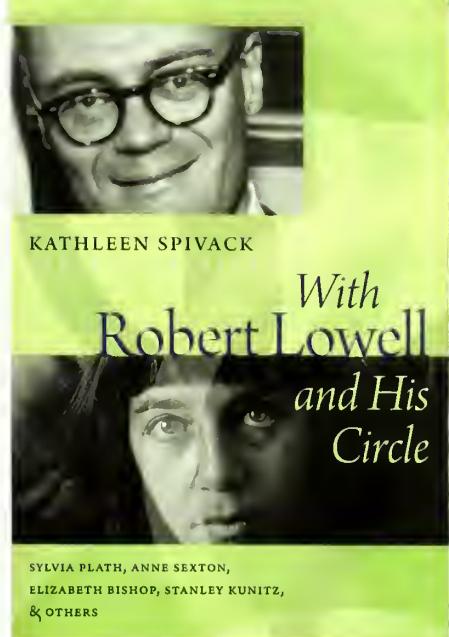
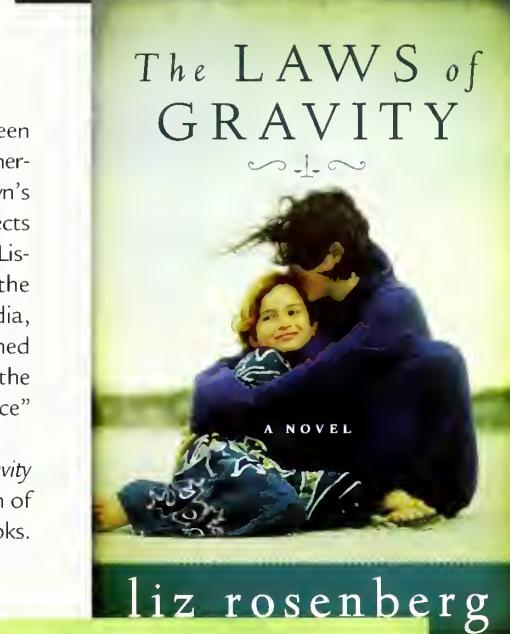
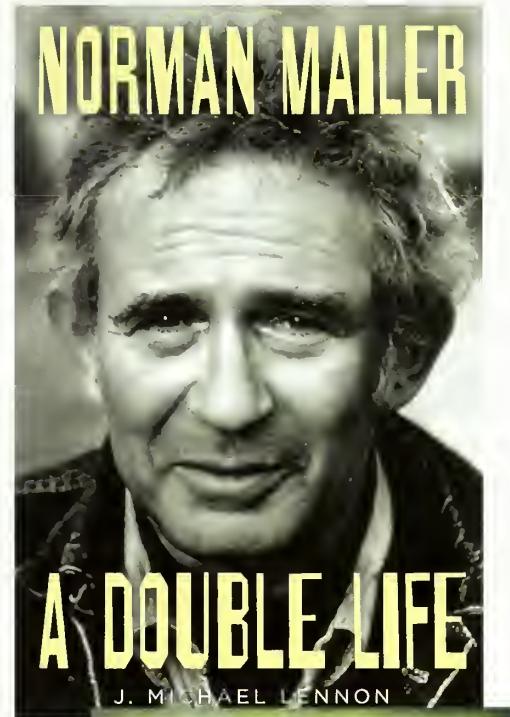
room for the surmising and hypothesizing, the psychological spelunking we admire in the great biographers." *Spelunking* refers to the exploration of underground caves, offering a new terrain for Mailer studies.

DERMOT MEAGHER, the first openly gay judge in Massachusetts, sworn in by Governor Michael Dukakis in 1989, had long planned for a second career after he retired in 2006, having read a poorly written but beautifully illustrated detective story while waiting in a dentist's office, and thinking he could write a better story, and create the drawings as well. He sold his first book twice, because two publishers went out of business before publication. His third book of fiction is *Lyons at the Gate* (CreateSpace, 2013), reprising his alter ego Judge Joe Lyons, who, graying, becomes highly desirable to a handsome Italian man who has a penchant for older, successful men. A founding member of the Massachusetts Lesbian and Gay Bar Association, Meagher takes us through the legal battle that made our state the first in the union to allow gay marriage, offering dual perspectives on how private life came into public acceptance.

OONA PATRICK, a Provincetown native, has been working with poet Frank Gaspar to foster the Luso-American cultural exchange, so embedded in Provincetown's history of Portuguese fishermen, who are often subjects for our artists. Gaspar formed *Presença/Presença* in Lisbon several years ago with sixteen members; now the group has grown ten times that size using social media, especially Facebook. Katherine Vaz, who has published a story in *Provincetown Arts*, will teach a workshop at the University of Lisbon on "Writing the Luso Experience" (<http://luso-american-conf.blogspot.com/>).

LIZ ROSENBERG's new novel, *The Laws of Gravity* (Amazon Publishing, 2013), is the fullest realization of themes the author has explored in thirty previous books. The gravitational forces in this simple but subtle story lift on waves of buoyant laughter, sink in troughs of despair, and ascend as if weightless into sublime wisdom. Two cousins, Ari and Nicole, who begin the novel as bonded children, later become separated over a legal battle for blood saved from Ari's umbilical cord. Nicole needs the blood to survive cancer of the blood, and the match is compatible, but Ari's acquiescence alters abruptly, and the case of the moral, ethical, and legal issues is enacted in scenes from the New York Supreme Court, casting a powerful matrix of themes that finely sharpens the turmoil and passion of the characters. The mental turmoil of Judge Solomon Richter is rendered with deep resonance, his rulings on biology running in the veins of living people.

CHEF ROSSI is the pen name for the owner of the Raging Skillet in New York, whom the *New York Times* called "the rebel anti-caterer" for her innovative combinations of food and art. She is also a writer who delivers a weekly story on Provincetown radio



station WOMR on her program *Bite This*. "Days of Awe" describes her days of catering for the first responders immediately following the destruction of the Twin Towers: "On my second day grilling burgers for the workers, I was taken on a cold-drink run to the place called the Hole, the deep collapsed area at Ground Zero, pushing a wheelbarrow filled with ice and Gatorade. Smoke and steam rose out of the wreckage as firefighters on their fresh-air breaks sat unfazed a few feet away. Sharp burnt bits of metal loomed over us. The background was total destruction. 'I'll take one of those!' a silver-haired firefighter said, and I handed him a Gatorade."

KATHLEEN SPIVACK first met Robert Lowell in 1959 as a student in his famous poetry workshop at Boston University, beginning an association that would last until Lowell's death in 1977. In her new book, *With Robert Lowell and His Circle: Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Elizabeth Bishop, Stanley Kunitz, and Others* (Northeastern University Press, 2012), Spivack is personal, anecdotal, and revealing, especially about the chafing of female poets under masculine dominance. She offers lively scenes of Lowell's teaching methods, his manic swings and bouts with alcohol, his brilliant and uncanny ability to find new ways to understand utterances. Spivack writes: "Frowning at a long, complicated, and much-worked-over poem, he would hopefully suggest: 'Put the end at the beginning and the beginning at the end.' This was guaranteed to throw a student-poet into a panic. The next class one handed in the revised poem, dutifully decapitated. Lowell squinted, looking down on the page as if he'd never seen the poem before. After a long pause came the soft distinctive Lowell murmur. 'This poem would be better if you put the end at the beginning and the beginning at the end.'"

FILM & THEATER

TIM HETHERINGTON's life is honored by his friend Sebastian Junger in the film he directed following Hetherington's death from a mortar wound in Libya, only weeks after he and Junger were nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature for the film *Restrepo*, which chronicled their up-close, embedded picture of twenty soldiers in a remote ridge on a mountain deep in Afghanistan. *Which Way Is the Front Line from Here?*—documenting the arc of Hetherington's life—premiered at Sundance before being shown on HBO in April. Hetherington is Junger's soul mate in bravery and curiosity, intrepid and daring, revealing that Hetherington's subject as a war photographer was not war but the people going through the intense human conditions that war creates. A trove of telling footage shows the arc of an artist's life, "a big life," Junger said, "focused on the quiet dignity of the human struggle." Hetherington bled to death on the way to the hospital because no one knew how to use a tourniquet; Junger has since founded Reporters Instructed in Saving Colleagues (www.risctraining.org).

Departed Friends



CIRO AND SAL AT CIRO & SAL'S RESTAURANT, 1955
PHOTO BY JAY SAFFRON, COURTESY OF THE COZZI FAMILY



RAY ELMAN, HUG, 2006 (PORTRAIT OF CIRO AND PATTI COZZI)

CIRIACO "CIRO" COZZI (1921–2013)

Ciro, as everyone knew him, is gone, but his life and work have left a strong imprint on this community. Since his death, I have visited his studio, together with his oldest daughter, Theo Christa, to view his work once again. I came away more thoroughly convinced than ever before that Ciro Cozzi was a truly unique painter who might have been one of the brightest stars in the constellation of American artists over the last half of the twentieth century. All the necessary elements were there. Whatever the medium he chose to work with—wood, clay, marble, or oil paint—that material responded to his individual touch with rare results. The sure imprint of his Italian heritage in the matter of color, form, and volumetric completeness, especially in his treatment of the figure, gave his creations a direct link to the masters of the Renaissance, and, like many artists who share that tradition, his belief in his antecedents and in himself made others believe in him also.

Throughout his developing years, Ciro automatically rose to the top of the class among his fellow students. Whether at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, the Art Students League, or, much earlier, at the Leonardo da Vinci Art School in New York (founded by "The Little Flower," Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia), Ciro, though short in stature, stood the tallest in his achievement in every circumstance. I knew of Ciro long before I met him. We shared a common heritage through his mother's family, who came from the Island of Ischia in the Bay of Naples, as did mine. His father was from northern Italy, probably in the area of the great stone quarries of Carrara and Pietrasanta, as his grandfather was a stone carver of some renown. I had heard of this "young lion" of an artist in the da Vinci School, where he had a reputation as the protégé of the Piccirilli brothers, all six of them, who were responsible for carving

the figure of Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, as well as many other public monuments around the country. Ciro learned from these remarkable brothers how to carve and how to throw up a full-size figure in clay.

Ciro's evolving career brought him in contact with the great muralist Jean Charlot at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, and, again, he was singled out as an outstanding student. Later, at the Art Students League, he was regarded as exceptional in Robert Brackman's class. Ciro came to Provincetown in the summer of 1946 to study with Henry Hensche, and this was the first time that Ciro and I met. Hensche was the gifted student of Charles W. Hawthorne, whose summer classes at the Cape Cod School of Art in Provincetown had been legendary. Hensche originally came from the Midwest and had had a thorough training in both sculpture and painting at the Art Institute of Chicago. In Henry's cryptic fashion, as the founder of his own school (after Hawthorne's death, entitled the Cape School of Art), he routinely treated his students with a kind of offhand contempt, sometimes bordering on disdain, but Ciro he treated, from the beginning, with respect.

As in the case of many an aspiring artist who follows the pursuit of art, however, Ciro's life took on a different aspect after his summer with Hensche, and he was diverted along a series of detours from the main road to his original destination. He had married Ero Mitchell, a woman of considerable artistic talent and sincere empathy for his burgeoning career, with whom he had four beautiful children: Theo Christa, Michael, Peter, and Alethea. This necessitated a change of circumstance so that he could provide for his family, which he did for an extraordinary number of years in the very successful restaurant called Ciro & Sal's, which he and I founded in 1953. At that point, he was almost totally deflected from the pursuit of his art by the demands of the business; however, in spite of his own artistic hiatus, he initiated and supported

many endeavors of other artists and institutions promoting the arts, such as the Provincetown Art Association, where he served as president for two terms: 1975–1977 and 1979–1983. During this period, the Art Association became the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, adding another layer of functional support for the arts. He also sponsored the week-long charette, in 1981, for the architects' design competition for the reconstruction of the Provincetown Playhouse on the Wharf, which had been burned in 1977. He hosted the needs of that effort at his own expense on location at the Flagship restaurant, which he then owned. Josephine and I participated as local jury members, together with I. M. Pei and other noted architects, witnesses to Ciro's generosity.

Looking back on his life, one can understand that Ciro's production of paintings was not as extensive as it might have been during his mature years, but each and every one of his remaining canvases and drawings will no doubt secure for him a firm legacy in the lexicon of American art.

—Salvatore Del Deo

PATRICIA COZZI (1925–2013)

Patti, Ciro's wife of forty-seven years, passed away on May 21, Ciro's birthday. She, like Ciro, was a well-known Provincetown resident. A registered nurse, she started the Drop In Center in Provincetown in the mid-'60s, later called Outer Cape Health, where she served on the board for many years. She and Ciro were longtime supporters of the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, and they hosted a yearly benefit, a garden party at their home on Commercial Street, a block from the Art Association, with the catering done by the restaurant Ciro owned. —CB



ARTHUR COHEN, 2007 PHOTO BY JAMES ZIMMERMAN

ARTHUR COHEN (1928–2012)

Arthur Cohen's paintings of Long Point Light, seen from a distance across the harbor, compound the capture of a mysterious atmosphere of blues and grays thinly layered over many days and evoke both the momentary and the monumental. The tiny spot of white at the very tip of the Cape gathers all that surrounds it, embodying in its focal point the hugeness of the harbor. Cohen studied with Edwin Dickinson, and the artists share a kinship in their fascination with refractions, which Cohen called the "ghost" in his paintings. His wife, the pianist Elizabeth Rodgers, recalls that "Arthur worked and lived according to his own vision: painting, etching, filming, photographing, sketching, building, creating gadgets and pulleys, writing letters, telling stories in his own one-of-a-kind way."

In 1996 we published an interview with Arthur by Bunny Pearlman, who wrote: "His paintings are built of layers of paint representing the layers of time and thought that went into their making." She asked Arthur, "Is there ever a moment of truth?" Arthur: "Oh, yes. It comes and then it goes. It dissolves. It never does me any lasting good. Just when I think I've got hold of it, I wake up—like a sexy dream, you wake before the end." Bunny: "So when do you decide the painting's finished?" Arthur: "Not often. It's like your life. It's not up to you when it's finished. Balance is about living in the moment and looking just ahead and not back and not at one's feet, like a tightrope walker."

— CB

JERRY NELSON

(1934–2012)

Jerry Nelson, a self-described actor trapped in a Muppet's costume, is one of the most famous disembodied voices in the entertainment world. For over forty years, he worked with Jim Henson's troupe on *Sesame Street*, the *Muppet Show*, *Fraggle Rock*, and several feature films—jobs he initially took while waiting for his "big break." He performed hundreds of characters—many who sang (often in character voice) alongside the likes of Ray Charles, Liza Minnelli, Harry Belafonte, Alice Cooper, the Mighty Mighty BossToneS, Johnny Cash, and dozens of others. A duet he performed as the lovable monster Scret with Lily Tomlin on *Saturday Night Live* remains one of the most syndicated spots in television.

I first met Jerry through Matt Caldwell (The Mayor of Corn Hill) and Dick Solberg, the Sun Mountain Fiddler, when I was director of the Eye of Horus Gallery. We shared a friendship that endured and flourished until the end. When Jerry moved to Truro more or less full-time, we played music together four or five times a week, with other musical friends, sometimes with a small audience, and in many public performances, but oftentimes just the two of us. He knew thousands of songs, wrote dozens of originals, and was possessed of that rare quality of a western-plains, high-lonesome tenor voice that half of Nashville would kill for.

Behind his theatrical and musical talent was a voracious mind, thirsty for knowledge and experience. He was well-read, well-rounded, and always eager to learn more. Grounded in philosophy, he was a kind of modern, self-made Zen master but also an armchair physicist and even a pretty good artist, filling sketchbooks and making fanciful sculptures. He even asked me to



BILL EVAUL, JERRY IN MY STUDIO, c. 2004

teach him my woodcut technique and acquitted himself quite nicely.

Jerry left this mortal coil last summer and his theatrical legacy is well documented worldwide. But many of his musical friends privately worried that his original song repertoire would get lost. Thankfully, some of his *Sesame Street* co-performers realized this occlusion and booked him a slot at the famed Nola Recording Studio (Sinatra, Garland, Beatles, et al.) in New York City with an eighteen-piece orchestra. The production cost a fortune, but Kevin Clash (Elmo) generously picked up the tab. Jerry brought me in to play the upright bass, and the Solberg brothers joined us, Dick on fiddle and Andy on the Telecaster guitar. We had a blast playing all of Jerry's songs, which we knew by heart, alongside these world-class studio musicians. Other *Sesame Street* musicians and performers contributed their talents—it was a real labor of love and a tribute to the high degree of respect held for Jerry by all who knew him. Although the production cost a fortune, having Jerry's voice saved for future generations to hear is priceless.

— Bill Evaul

WILLIAM TCHAKIRIDES

(1946–2013)

Bill Tchakirides directed the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown for five years beginning in 1977, transforming the organization from a local art center to a nationally recognized art mecca for emerging artists. In the second year of the famous National Endowment for the Arts Challenge Grants, Tchakirides won a \$50,000 grant for an architectural contest to design renovation of the buildings. That year only five grants were awarded—most of them to major institutions, such as the Brooklyn Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Museum of Modern Art. Roger Skillings posed the question: "What if there had been no Bill Tchakirides for FAWC? Those were primitive, perilous, formless times. Our first professional director, he was a gruff, expansive, loud-laughing, irascible, scornful, frenetic, brilliant dynamo who moved everything out of his office but his desk and the telephone with a long cord plugged into the middle of the floor, which he circled, roaring into the receiver like a gleeful broker in a bull market."



BILL TCHAKIRIDES AND STANLEY KUNITZ, 1979
PHOTO BY ELLEN WILSON

— CB



EVENT HORIZON

THE ART OF ANNE PACKARD

By André van der Wende



IS IT SAFE or even right to call Anne Packard an icon? I think so. As one of the finest painters of the Cape Cod Bay, the dramatic sweep of turbulent sky and sand flats that seemingly run on forever as they race to meet a sliver of water, it's easy to forget, amongst the homogenous reams of Cape Cod landscape painters, just how good she is. The irony being that Packard has had her fair share of imitators, a point of contention that raises her ire. They procure the "look"—a lone dory isolated in a seamless void, flat tracts of sand, sea, and sky—but very few are able to match imagery with soul the way she does. She's one of the great painters whose principal subject is the horizon, demarcated in contrasting clarity by a tight dark line of water, or ambiguously shrouded in fog with all points in between. Where does it begin? Where does it end? What's beyond? The unknown, the abyss, the cosmos, hope?

A painting such as *Ghost Boat* (1999) looks as if it just landed, arriving a moment ago from the ether, and is an incredible abstract painting in its own right. Plenty of other artists have exploited the expansive arch of Provincetown's bay, with the town on one side and the sand flats on the other, but no one catches it the quite way Packard does: a bell-jar moment with elegant mystery and serious splendor, ascribing psyche to the landscape while searching for truth. Packard, literally, lives that



(ABOVE) GHOST BOAT, 2002, OIL ON CANVAS, 48 BY 48 INCHES. COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING
(TOP) PROVINCETOWN HARBOR, 1999, OIL ON CANVAS, 48 BY 72 INCHES. COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING
(FACING PAGE) ANNE PACKARD. ALL CURRENT PHOTOS OF THE ARTIST AND HER HOME BY PHIL SMITH



ANNE PACKARD IN HER HOME, SURROUNDED BY PAINTINGS BY HER GRANDFATHER, MOTHER, AND DAUGHTERS

iconic Provincetown view of the wharfs, buildings, and steeples lined up beneath the lightning rod of the Provincetown Monument as they all curve around the harbor. On the top floor of her waterfront home, her bedroom is sandwiched between the bay on one side, and her studio on the other, facing views of Provincetown harbor bisected by Provincetown proper from deep in the East End. "She rolls out of bed into the canvas!" says daughter Cynthia Packard. It's cliché to call it breathtaking, but that's what it is.

The name "Packard" carries a legacy of art in this town; daughters Cynthia and Leslie are both artists in their own right, with Cynthia in particular achieving comparable success. Anne's maternal grandmother,

Zella Bohm, was an accomplished artist with the brush, but it's really her grandfather Max Bohm, a distinguished romantic-visionary painter, who has left the most indelible impression upon the granddaughter he never met. Packard was born ten years after Bohm died in Provincetown in 1923 at



MAX BOHM, *BLUE EVENING*, YEAR UNKNOWN, OIL ON CANVAS, 28 BY 22 INCHES
PACKARD HAS LIVED WITH THIS PAINTING THROUGHOUT HER LIFE AND HAS
BEEN DEEPLY INFLUENCED BY IT.



EVENING, 2004, OIL ON CANVAS, 36 BY 36 INCHES COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING



(RIGHT) NOR'EASTER, 2000,
OIL ON CANVAS, 36 BY 60 INCHES
COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING

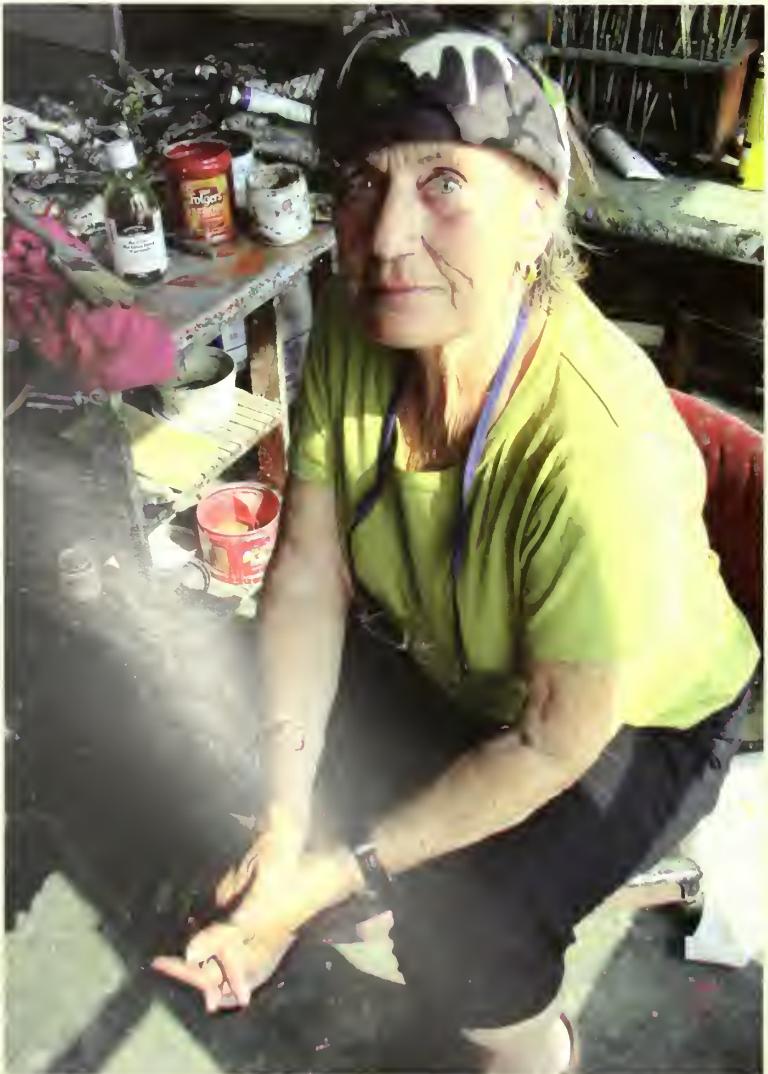
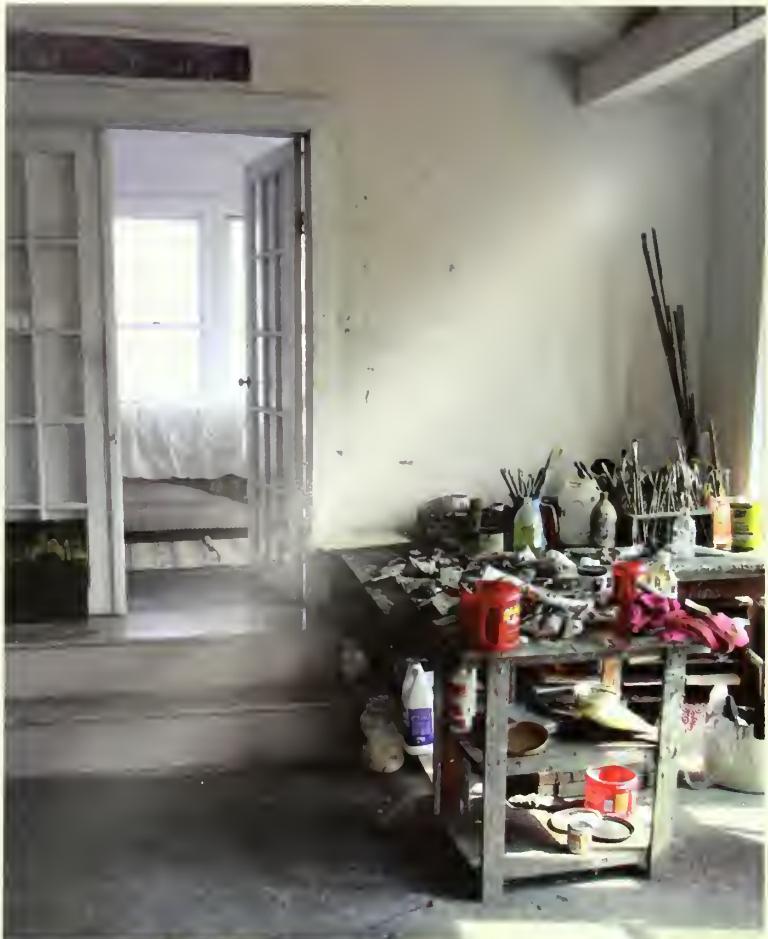
(BELOW) SEASCAPE, 2011,
OIL ON CANVAS, 60 BY 36 INCHES

the age of fifty-five. In many ways, Packard's role has been to extend that legacy, so that the void his passing created will be fulfilled and burnished by future generations. "It all starts with my grandfather, Max Bohm. And if he hadn't come here to Provincetown, if he hadn't been an artist, none of this would've happened," Packard says. "I never knew him but I grew up with all his paintings around me and his *blue*—I just always wanted his *blue*. I went to Brittany, where he lived years ago, because I wanted to breathe what he breathed, I wanted to get that inside of me. I was sketching on this hillside and I felt him there—so in a way I'm always trying to paint up against him, not to honor him, but to push myself to where he pushed himself."

Part of Packard's remarkable story is that she's largely self-taught. There's no BFA, no MFA, no Hans Hofmann school here. Barring an extended series of classes with Charles Hawthorne and Edwin Dickinson disciple Philip Malicoat in the late '70s, Packard has done it, for the most part, on her own. A remarkably original raw talent, what Packard has is something you can't get at art school anyway: a particularly refined sensibility for capturing moods with unique sensitivity to a timeless moment. They're piercingly true without sentiment, so that when you look at an Anne Packard, there's no grandstanding, no ego. They get right to the point.

She doesn't hold your hand in a painting by taking the viewer through friendly tiers of blazing color and light the way so many painters of the Cape light do. "I'm not interested," she says. "I like nothing better than a good storm." Her palette is reflective, earthy, stormy, and cool, calibrated to a certain naturalism and Packard's own deeply private sensibility. Her paintings can be moody, briny, and achingly still, paired down to minimal abstraction, a vertical stack of sea and sky, and where they meet, the horizon, an indeterminate measure of the two. But the reason so many people get her paintings is not because of their adherence to an expressive realism, it's because they *feel* them. A good Anne Packard you feel before you even really see it. The realism is emotional, existential, and mysteriously direct. Her work has been called melancholy, but I find it not so much plaintive as truthful. As she likes to remind us, her paintings reside in solitude, but they're never lonely or despairing. They are about one's intimate relationship to nature, a conduit to a life force that stands outside of us.





If Packard's persona has a reputation for being antisocial, feisty, tenacious, tough, and singular, then circumstances decreed it. She carries herself in the posture of a survivor—and she is one—but she is equally generous, warm, funny, compassionate, and humble. She's *true*; there's no facade to Packard, and her utter lack of pretension—what you see is what you get—is refreshing and makes for easy conversation. Over the course of several long visits throughout the fall, winter, and spring at her waterfront home and studio, Packard talks openly about her hard-knock life; raising five children alone and losing one; Provincetown, and her outsider status here; determination and recovery from loss; success and integrity. But mostly we talk about what is at the heart of everything—her painting.

It's easy to talk to Packard about her work because she feels it intuitively and realizes it emotionally. Nothing is over-intellectualized, although she's one of the smartest landscape painters around. "I don't plan anything out," she says, adding that her paintings come "from the gut." Free of rhetorical cant and full of heart, they derive from her core: "I can paint dories out of my head." Even when she is at her most "scratchy" (wintertime), the conversation is alive and warm, her presence vivid, full of mutual exchange, passionate exclamations, colorful language, and pounding of the table to make a point. Not unlike the sense one has when viewing her paintings, time evaporates with Packard so what was to be an hour-long meeting would quickly become three. She will be eighty this summer, and is still vibrant and strong, still stretching her own canvases and tossing the large ones around with the ease of a pioneer gal.

Touring her home is a family affair; paintings by her grandparents, Zella and Max, and her daughters, Cynthia and Leslie, line the walls as reminders of past, present, and future. On the ground floor in a back room, a number of canvases, too large for her to carry up the stairs, sit in various states of confusion and correction. She really works the paintings, turning them upside down, confronting them in reverse through a mirror, and painting right over what to an outsider might appear to be a perfectly affable ground. "She'll move the composition around, and then she'll throw paint on it, then she'll stomp on it, and then she'll find something," observes Cynthia.

"I'm just waiting for something," Packard concurs. It's as though the means to success is out of her hands, the painting declaring itself if Packard is only attuned enough to see it, hear it. One day, when Cynthia and Leslie were children playing on their mother's large deck, a painting was suddenly hoisted out of an upper window and into the bay, followed by a series of loud expletives. Looking at one of her large canvases, which in many ways appears perfectly settled, Packard is not so sure: "It's too thin, you can see the canvas right through, but I just feel it needs some heaviness to it. . . . I want it richer!" She sighs heavily. "It needs some life. It's a classic Anne Packard, but it seems very flat to me. It just doesn't live yet. I've got to build up with some real," she draws the air in sharply, "juicy light there!" She refers to the open expanse of nothingness. "I painted this first, and then I put the boat in a month later."

It all suggests that Packard takes her time with her work. She may have several things going on at once, but a large part of her process is observing, sitting with the painting, seeing and feeling what fits and what does not. Time is an inordinately large component of her work, in terms of both process and its reading. She is able to arrest it somehow. "You know, I don't think an awful lot. . . . It just happens. I depend on that a lot, just some kind of instinct," she tells me, referring to how she thinks long, then acts quickly, stepping outside of the painting in a sense.



A. PACKARD 2003

(ABOVE) RED DORY, 2003, OIL ON CANVAS, 25 BY 32 INCHES COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING

(FACING PAGE) ABOVE:VIEW INTO ANNE PACKARD'S BEDROOM, SANDWICHED BETWEEN HER STUDIO AND THE BAY; BELOW: PACKARD IN HER STUDIO

Cynthia helps with this process. The artistic crucible Packard shares with her daughter is a crucial, dynamic, often volatile relationship. "She comes over almost daily to give me a crit," Packard explains. "I'm very dependent on her still. We push each other. I have to trust her—trust her maybe more than myself on something like that. Isn't that interesting?" There's no holding back. And, as is often the case, when one is hearing what one doesn't want to hear but already knows, it can spark fireworks. The same dynamic holds true when Packard critiques Cynthia's work. "She wants me to give her a crit, but she can't stand it! . . . She gets such an attitude. But she needs it, so she puts up with it, and then I just get out of there as fast as I can. I don't take it personally because it's her personality. She says, 'I don't know, Ma. It's maybe because you're my mother, but I want to strangle you. I can't stand it, and you were right—but I need you, and I want you to do it!' It just curdles her blood!"

"Now she will come upstairs," Packard continues, "and I say 'I need you, Cynthia, take a look!' Sometimes she'll say 'Yes,' other times she won't even finish walking up the stairs and she'll pretend to put a finger down her throat, 'Ugh!' Now that stimulates the hell out of me," she says rapping the table, "because I think she's got such good taste and I know if I do something good and she says it's good I can trust that." There is much love, much humor between the two. "She has been my mentor at times, too," Cynthia sheepishly admits.

Sitting at a table next to the expanse of bay windows that overlook the harbor on an overcast, gray day with an "Anne Packard" sky, we sit down to a breakfast of linguica, sliced red onion, white bread, and coffee that

Packard has prepared. When we first meet, she's wearing a chartreuse scarf around her head that brings out the intensity of her hazel-colored eyes, a gray knit waistcoat, an orange sweatshirt, and faded blue jeans pocked with paint. It's typical Anne Packard: pragmatic and user-friendly. By her own admission, she errs on the side of the masculine, part of her character and bearing that she says is integral to her work: "It's all my masculine qualities coming out because I am kind of masculine in a lot of ways." She may be referring in part to her sharp, broad features, high cheekbones and lantern jaw. She's done her time as a "'50s housewife," so that now there's nothing demure about Packard or her work: they are both strong, resilient, and to the point. She prefers the company of men, and most of her collectors are men.

Being an artist, Packard says, "is a blessing, and a torment." I ask how it is a torment. "I never ever finally get there," she explains, "and I guess there never is a getting there. You just try to take it to the next level, but then you get to that level and you want to reach again, right?" She raps the table affirmatively in front of her with her palm. "And God knows I don't know what I'm reaching for half the time. I'm a very visceral person. I'm not an intellectual painter. That's why I started—because it was a very important way to express something in me."

Her outsider status remains fascinating, a position Packard openly covets and long reveres. "I may hold myself apart from people, but it's not because I think I'm special in any way. If you can believe it, it's almost a kind of shyness. . . . I am not social at all. Everything is family." I ask her where she thinks she would be if she had not found painting. She considers



FOG, 2002, OIL ON CANVAS, 20 BY 24 INCHES COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING



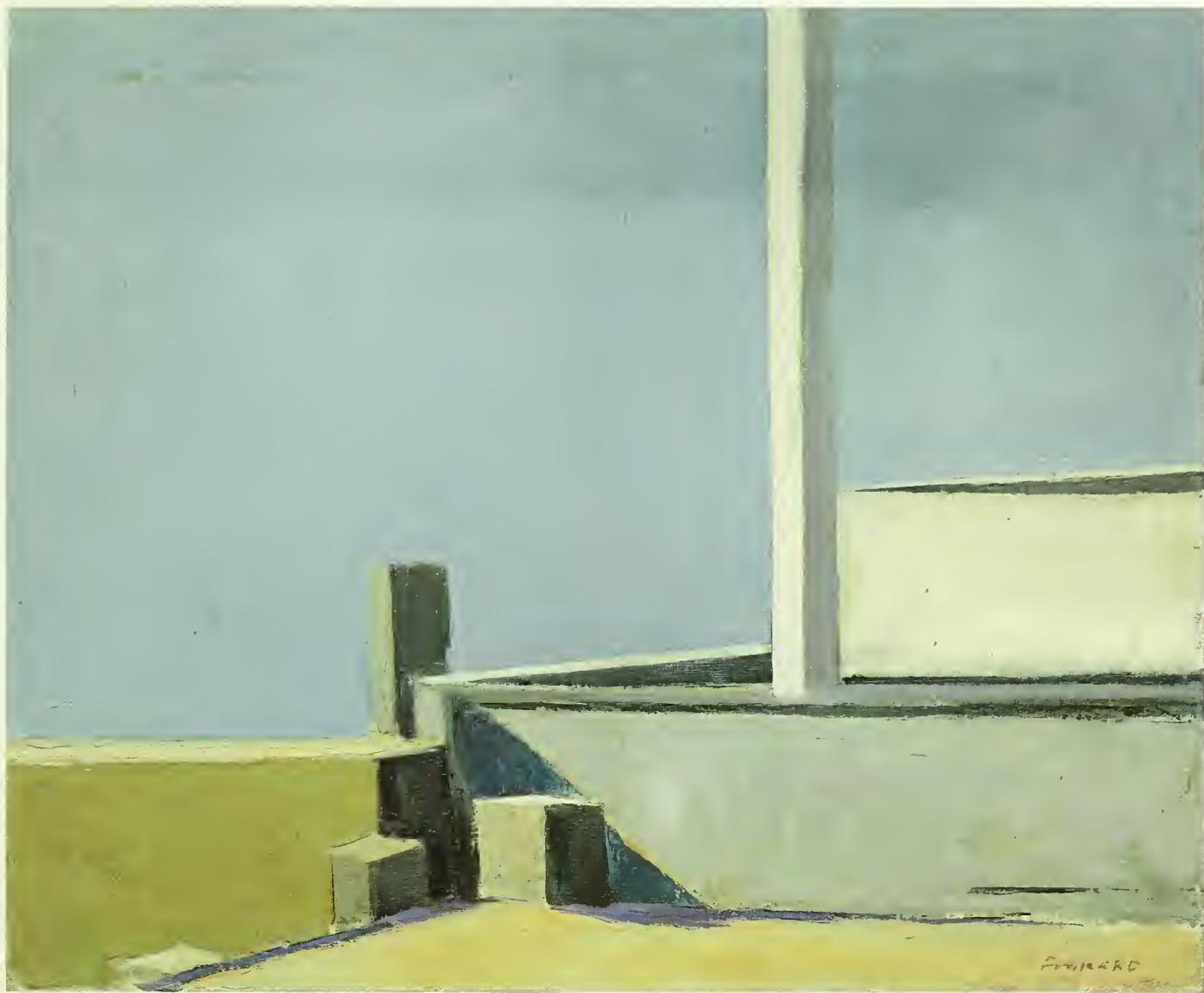
SEVERAL OF THE "MINIS" IN A CORNER OF PACKARD'S STUDIO

this for a long time before responding. "I'd still be outside of the regular people," she says, laughing.

Packard has always felt like an outsider, perhaps from the time she was born in White Plains, New York, in 1933. Raised in Hyde Park, Packard

found that her destiny was spelled out for her by her physician father, who steered a compliant Anne toward secretarial school and early marriage. She married George Packard, an English teacher, when she was twenty-one years old, then lived in Princeton, New Jersey, happily raising a family that would eventually include five children. "I was brought up to be a mother and a wife," she tells me, "and my parents didn't let me go to art school, even though I wanted to go. I had to either be a nurse or go to secretarial school. I was brought up thinking, 'You're just a girl, and you are stupid anyway,' because I was always sort of dyslexic. I just didn't think I was much of anything, so I got married and I had all those kids! Five kids in seven years—that I could do successfully, and I enjoyed it."

As for her art education, Packard had taken a couple of courses as a freshman at Bard College. "It was terrible!" she says. "I didn't have anything to say. I think I had to live a little bit." She didn't return to painting again until she was thirty and visiting Barnstable. "I lived on the tip end of Sandy Neck every summer with all the kids. And there was no electricity, no running water, and so on . . . it was very free living. And someone brought me over a set of acrylics, and said, 'Why don't you play around with these?' I just picked up a little piece of driftwood and painted a boat, and then I did another, and everybody loved them! This is how I started. Painting on pieces of driftwood." She no longer paints on driftwood, but she has maintained the format in her postcard-size paintings that she calls her "minis," delicate, outrageously alive pieces full of internal details and reflecting her inquisitive mind. They offer her a freedom that she tries to carry over into her large paintings. "I love them! The whole world is in there," she says.



BULKHEADS, 1985, OIL ON CANVAS, 20 BY 24 INCHES COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING

While Packard's introduction to painting reflected a time of inspiration and discovery, it was also a world that was soon to change dramatically. Her husband, after seventeen years of marriage, left for Paris with one of his nineteen-year-old students—an act of self-involvement and irresponsibility that left no support for Packard or the children. Still in New Jersey, she went into full-swing survival mode: "That's when I really started to scratch; I sold Amway door-to-door; I ran a catering service, all for Princeton, with cocktail parties out of my kitchen, and we survived!" When she reached toward her father for help, she was rebuffed with, "Sorry, Anne. You made your bed, you lie in it."

"I was devastated," she recalls, "and now I know it was the best gift he ever gave me. Everything I had done, I had done it on my own, so it gave me an extra sense of self."

Adversity imparted valuable lessons, but tragedy also intruded on her life in the loss of her eighteen-year-old son, Stephen, in 1974, missing, presumed murdered in the Californian mountains. "It wasn't easy. I was like a pariah, you know: 'Her husband left her, her son, this and that, they don't have any money, and they're different anyway.' You don't want to be different out in New Jersey, let me tell you!" Don't call it melancholy, but there is a solemnness, a benediction, to some of her paintings—the lone dory, or boats in pairs, adrift in shrouds of blue and endless registers of gray and tan.

It's Provincetown's incorrigible trait to be different, and here, beside the healing ocean she had known since she was a small girl, Packard could just be. When she finally left Princeton and spent her first summer in 1975 at the house on Commercial Street where she still resides today, Packard was broken: "All I wanted to do was return to Provincetown. I just developed this

heartache for this place, as a child even, and all I wanted to do was come back here." Come back, and get to work. Two years later she was living in Provincetown full-time and painting—not to pass the time, but to survive.

Packard seems to thrive in hard times. It's a great motivator. "That's how I got where I am now. You know, I did every sidewalk show I could find and that's the only way I could get anywhere; no galleries would ever look at me. I'm out here," she says, pointing out toward Commercial Street, "hanging my paintings on the fence because everyone just sort of laughed at me. For a long time all I did was paint to survive and I didn't dare to think of any ambitions—it just didn't enter my mind. I was lucky because right from the get-go I always



A CORNER OF PACKARD'S LIVING ROOM, OVERLOOKING PROVINCETOWN HARBOR



ROCKPORT BOATS, 2003, OIL ON CANVAS, 30 BY 25 INCHES COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING



AGAINST THE SEA, 1993, OIL ON CANVAS, 36 BY 36 INCHES COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING

"In town here, back then, in the middle '70s? I was just that woman with all those kids down the street that hung her paintings on the fence."

sold. Even if they were ten or fifteen dollars, it was okay."

Philip Malicoat helped her to refine her skills. "Phil's classes were wonderful," she says. "There were only about five or six of us at most, and they were three times a week in his studio. It was an ongoing class. Phil was color-blind and that's one of the reasons why, I think, I don't have a lot of color in my paintings. But he taught me value, and he taught me to paint the negative space. He gave me hope, and he had hope in me." However, she says, she ultimately disappointed him, and he would chastise her and question her integrity amid accusations of abusing her muse by selling her paintings from the fence outside her home.

I ask if she ever approached any galleries to show her work, and she's taken aback at such a suggestion. "In town here, back then, in the middle '70s?" she asks, exasperated. "I was just that woman with all those kids down the street that hung her paintings on the fence. . . . I like business, I'm good at it. But I never went to any of the openings, and I didn't even try to get with the in-crowd or anything like that. It was easier to stay aloof and," she pauses, "I was terrified of that scene. . . . There were a lot of big names, and I didn't know anything. I was just doing what I was doing. I have to say it was Motherwell who gave me some credibility. He saw something in me that I didn't. I was just trying to survive."

The story of Packard selling her paintings from the fence outside her house is by now a part of her lore, along with the story of how neighbor Robert Motherwell started buying them so that her work started to gain momentum and cachet. The real story, however, is about raw talent and an inordinate amount of hard work and determination: "It's all about commitment and work and discipline." Packard painted, and painted, sold, kept her head down, and painted some more. She painted through grief, she painted to live, and she did it on her own.

"I know how lucky I've been, too," she tells me, "but I've worked for it. . . . This is what Phil used to say: 'It's 5 percent talent and the rest is work' and I never stopped and it worked! And then, somewhere along the line, I dared to think privately that maybe I had something special—but still I could only look at it sideways."



WINTER STORM, 2013, OIL ON CANVAS, 36 BY 48 INCHES



BACK BEACH, 2013, OIL ON CANVAS, 30 BY 40 INCHES

It's early spring when I last visit Packard, the day sunny and bright, the water still and glassy. "I'm going to retire!" she announces enthusiastically. This is a different Packard than the one I last saw in January. "Everything was gloom," she admits. "I didn't have anything in me. Nothing! I felt I'd said everything I could say, and I was tired of producing. It made me crazier and crazier."

At this point in her career, untethered by various galleries' demands and client requests, Packard has severed all ties to concentrate on her own gallery, which she opened on Commercial Street in 1986 in the old Christian Science Church. Now she's free to paint at will: "I'm delighted! I figure I have done my duty and what I want to do now is paint and not produce. I felt all this great relief; I did a lot of reading; I've walked three to four miles a day now; I stopped smoking. . . . I feel marvelous!"

After a winter sojourn to Puerto Rico, she came home resolved not to paint, to just do what she wanted—but that changed after a major snow-storm battered the Cape, which she witnessed firsthand at a beach in Truro: "That storm came and I went out to Ballston Beach and spent two to three hours there. I was so turned on by that storm and the water coming through—just the breath of it! And I came home and I started to

"Everybody wants a boat? I'm not painting that boat. I'm not doing boats! I feel very free. . . . God, I feel good!"

paint. I haven't stopped." At this point, we make our way upstairs to the studio to see the fruits of her labor.

"This is all new work up here and it's kind of different!" Packard says, waving at canvases on the walls, an easel, and more paintings stacked on the floor, all in various states of resolve. She's clearly animated, and excited, flitting from one canvas to the next: "All of this was done in the last three weeks. . . . I just started fussing. It's all in the mind's eye." While Packard does her share of plein-air work, in the studio she works from memory and imagination: "I just make it up. I start out with one little image and then change it." A large painting of a lone figure standing on a grassy beach knoll overlooking a stark white sea and closed gray sky is still contentious. "This one is still looking a little corny, but I don't know. . . ." I ask her about the figure. "I had to have the figure there," she says, discussing this as a way to anchor the picture. "But I can't quite put it on the canvas. . . . I hate figures, that it needs a figure . . . doesn't it?" she asks, still unsure, questioning. The figure has moved several times, from left to right, Packard says, explaining the painting's cycle of possibilities.

There's another small painting of a simple building nestled amongst verdant green fields and woods. It's peaceful, strong, direct. She made it



THE VIEW OF THE TOWN AND BAY FROM PACKARD'S STUDIO

into a larger version that, as it stands, is more finished and romantic, but Packard still prefers the original. "I like that painting and it's very different for me. It's more of my grandfather." Bohm constantly finds his way into Packard's work, through his palette, his use of silhouetted forms, or in more direct references, such as the majestic poetry of Packard's schooners and rigged vessels, which we can see in *Solitude 11* (2005), a clear nod to Bohm's own ties to sea and sails. For right now, however, her subject matter has shifted focus. "So I've been painting no boats!" she announces emphatically, a conscious decision to defy expectations. There's a tall, minimal painting of a thin horizon line, the top right flank bruised with a subtle spread of indelible gray that she achieved by accidentally pouring turpentine and manipulating it across the surface. For all of Packard's horizon paintings that allude to Mark Rothko's late work and color-field painting, she still manages to create a dimensionality that feels specific to time and place. "I feel alive again!" she says, as though surprised by her own comment. "I really thought, 'That's it, Anne, that is it. You've said everything and you're just repeating yourself.' It's crazy, isn't it? The business of being an artist."



THE CAPE, 2013, OIL ON CANVAS, 18 BY 24 INCHES



BEACHED, 2013, OIL ON CANVAS, 24 BY 30 INCHES



TWO BOATS, 2003, OIL ON CANVAS, 44 BY 72 INCHES COURTESY FIELDS PUBLISHING

We talk about her playfulness as an artist and actually having fun in the studio, not tightening up and not letting it become all work. She explains how this quality has changed her approach to painting, and life, especially over the last few months. "When I was going through this thing of saying, 'I'm going to semiretire, I'm not going to produce,' I realized that all these years I would get up and feel like I was going to work. Work! Every day! And, yes, with work you can have discoveries, so good things would

happen, but, while it was fun, it was also work, and I am not going to work anymore. I'm just going to do it, and these things that are coming, I'll put 'em out there and that will be that. Everybody wants a boat? I'm not painting that boat. I'm not doing boats! I feel very free, I feel," she pauses, "God, I feel good! I'm even running to be a library trustee and I never run out and do those kinds of public things or get involved. But I decided I was going to give back a little bit, and see what happens. Raise a little help down there."

Is this Packard coming out and shedding her scaly skin? The prickly visage masks feelings of vulnerable self-doubt. "I would just like to know if I'm a good painter or not. And I really don't know," she explains. "I was told I was no good for anything most of my life except to be a female. Isn't that awful?" Reacting against expectations and the status quo is what has defined her; she refuses to be tamped down by other people's expectations of what a women should do. "All my life I've always fought against everything," she tells me. "I always felt I was different, not better. I wasn't going to be part of the herd, so I always picked something that was going to be outrageous to do. Even as a little girl, I'd climb the highest, I'd be tougher than any boy. And then as a young woman, I could be wilder than anybody. . . . I was going to dress differently, I wasn't going to be a part of the establishment. But everything was focused on a way not to be better, but to be different, to be outrageous. After five kids, I could compete in any swimming contest. I remember going into a physical contest with my husband's friends and beating all of them at sit-ups—and they were all athletes. It's directed my whole life."

She refers to her work as a kind of nostalgia rooted not in sentiment but in truth, a patina of a perfect moment or a past age: "I keep going back to the solitary,



nostalgia. It's that sense of long ago from the flats here in Provincetown." Her son Michael is a commercial fisherman in town, and she likes to feed off that energy of the water and the bustle of the piers. "It's all about the drama of the sea, and the fisherman," she explains. "He's a dying breed now and he knows it, but I love that connection. It makes me feel part of what Provincetown used to be." An artist recently visited the studio and summed up Packard's nostalgia as "quietly leading us into a world where time and space seem to float effortlessly . . . silencing the chaos around us."

She does all this with no flashiness, no pomposity, trickery, overembellishment, or fuss. Confronting a painting such as *Fog* (2002), or *Ghost Boat* from the same year, Packard talks about them as apparitions, as though she's unable to direct the experience, and the experience directs her. "I don't know what I'm doing," she says, and coming from Packard, that's no false modesty. In *Two Boats* (2003), a large six-foot-long canvas, there are two dories anchored on the flats, suspended in a vaporous field of tan and warm gray. There's lots of open space, vast tracts that would send other artists scurrying, but Packard is a master of corralling such boundlessness into a compelling unified whole. There's nothing extraneous in these empty spaces, which you feel you could step and wander freely into. It's a land with no borders. It's a brave painting.

You could say the same about *Evening*, from 2002, and *Red Dory*, painted a year later, paintings that Packard reveals were a breakthrough: "I just like solitary objects. I like all that space in there, that single object. Of course, everything's sort of singular out here anyway, or out in the dunes. . . it's just instinct. I can't take credit for it in a way!" She has an unsurpassed facility for knowing when to leave something alone.

Packard has also tried her hand at "straight" abstraction, but by her own admission the paintings come out resembling what she thinks abstraction should look like. She



HINT OF PURPLE, 2011, OIL ON CANVAS, 48 BY 48 INCHES

"It took me a lot of courage to finally not put something in it. They're so simplistic. That's where I really like to go, and it's hard to lead people there because they still want what they think is 'Anne Packard.'"



(TOP TO BOTTOM) ANNE PACKARD IN FRONT OF HER HOME IN PROVINCETOWN; PACKARD WITH HER DAUGHTER, CYNTHIA, IN 2008; PACKARD SURROUNDED BY HER CHILDREN (LEFT TO RIGHT: MICHAEL, SUSAN, CYNTHIA, AND LESLIE IN 2001)

needn't try so hard; she's already an abstract painter par excellence, with broad open sweeps of muted color that meet with generosity and the geometry of sails and boats nestled within. I like to get up close to these surfaces, which collate abstractions within abstractions and are immersed in possibilities, layering memory and motions of trust and distrust that coalesce into something honest. Look at *Bulkheads* (1985), an architectonic snapshot, all right angles and diagonals sculpted with the help of a palette knife, or *Rockport Boats* (2003), a modest painting of boats tied next to the waterfront, both paintings built up in an abstract manner of strong diagonals and contrasting values. They're both fine examples of how to build a painting, but next to *Sand, Sea and Sky II* (2002), they almost appear "cluttered." I ask Packard if she ever thought she would achieve an effect like this, in which the elements are reduced to a wavering white horizon line, and a blanket of gray sky meets the baseline of the flats.

"It took a lot of courage for me to not put something in it. They're so simplistic. That's where I really like to go, and it's hard to lead people there because they still want what they think is 'Anne Packard.'" They're still a quintessentially Cape Cod experience, specific to our locale, but also reflect a broad perspective beyond the regional that makes them universal and transcendent. Packard doesn't consider herself to be a regional painter and has carried her muse on her prodigious travels over the years to Mexico, Ireland, Italy, France, Montana, California, and Maine. Often painted "en plein air," or sometimes worked up into larger studio paintings, the travel paintings and sketches are lively, vibrantly fresh forays with an often brighter palette. They're an invigorating adjunct to her large Cape paintings, giving her a chance to refresh her eye and relax in a playful noncommittal way.

It used to be that Packard would paint all day; now, it's just mornings. It's not a sign of slowing down, it's a sign that she doesn't have to push herself anymore. "I get up at six thirty, read the paper, walk, come back, work. Nap, work for maybe another hour or two if I'm in the mood—but it's the morning when the inspiration comes. The other times, I'm sort of fussing around and wondering and looking. And you know, it's not just when you paint—I work when I go to bed at night. Painting, of course, is my best friend, my best companion. I can always go there, up to the studio, and do it, so I'm not just sort of flailing around in my old age saying, 'What am I going to do with the rest of my life?' Even if I repeat myself, I have something in me that somebody wants." Anne Packard, despite the challenges that have marked her journey, continues to thrive. "I am not a victim and I was determined not to be a victim. I still paint, I've still got the search in me. I get pretty sick of that horizon, but lately I've enjoyed it more than I've ever enjoyed it. I've enjoyed all the Cape. I really appreciate what I have. It's an appreciation." □

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All images courtesy of Fields Publishing are from the award-winning book *Anne Packard*.

Cynthia Packard

FINDING THE LINE

By Christopher Busa

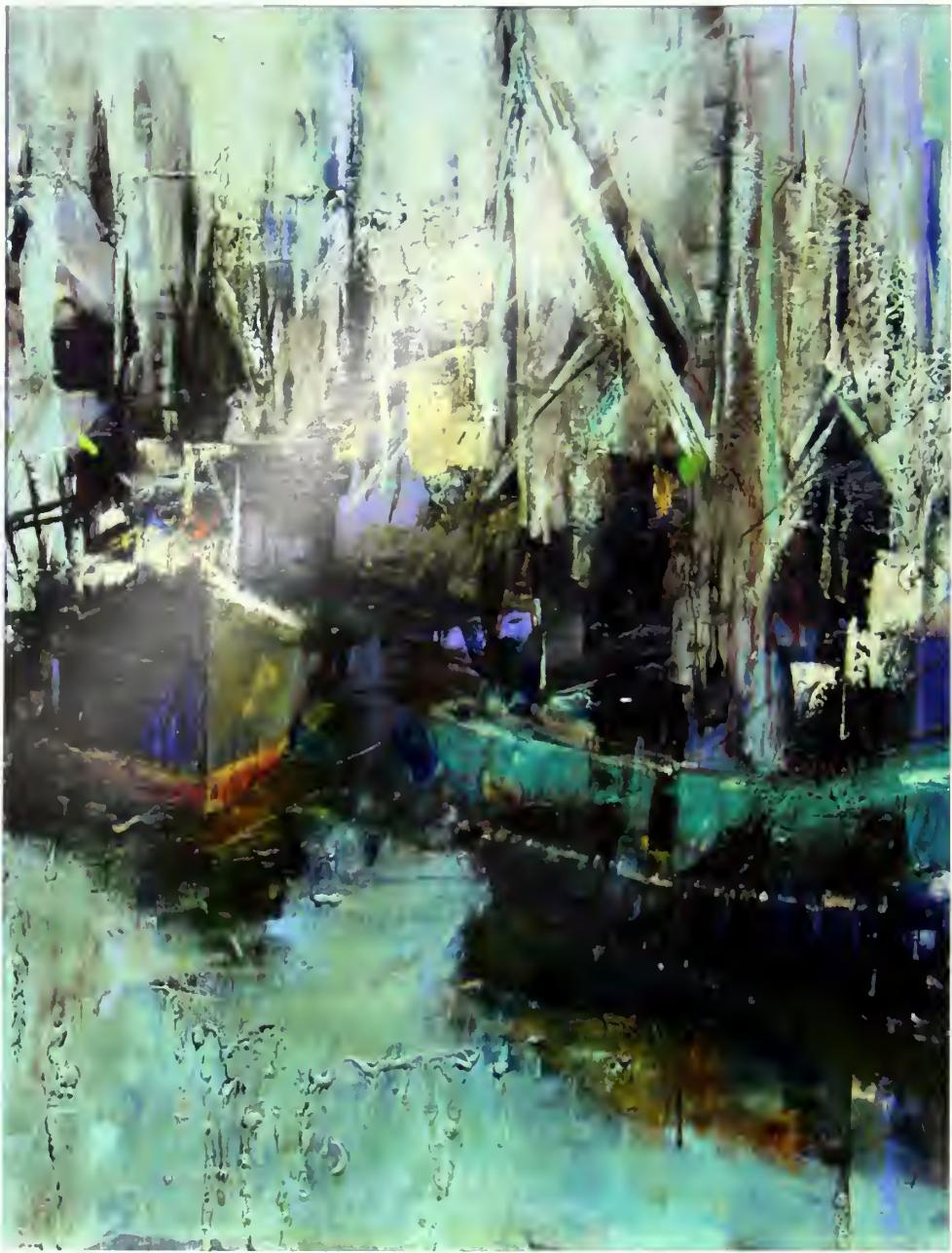
N THE SPRING of 2012, shortly after the killing of Trayvon Martin in Florida, Cynthia Packard woke up in the middle of the night, burning with rage.

Her marriage to an African-American man had blessed her with four multiracial children, and she recalled their teenage years when they all wore “hoodies,” the roomy, head-covering sweatshirts that were cozy, warm, and soft as pajamas. Playing basketball in the fall, her sons played on opposing teams, wearing contrasting colors to identify which team they belonged to. From a state of deep sleep, she was shocked to picture a seventeen-year-old African-American male, confronted by an armed civilian, plunging his hands deep into his pockets, gazing at the ground, avoiding eye contact or sudden movement, seeking only to be nonconfrontational. The artist wondered what her sons would do in such a situation—what choice would they have but to fight or flee?

Working intensely in the following weeks, Packard produced a dozen paintings portraying the ambiguous “menace” of the lost teenager, about whom President Obama said, “If I had a son, he’d look like Trayvon.” The killer instead saw a suspicious thug, casing houses vulnerable to robbery. Trayvon had been sauntering slowly in warm rain. The police had been alerted but had not yet arrived. This shooting brought national attention to issues surrounding racial profiling, and the consensus was clear: it should not have happened. Packard’s volatile paintings, characteristically, make an impact, rage



WEIGHT, 2012, OIL ON CANVAS, 40 BY 36 INCHES



FISHING VESSEL, 2012, OIL ON CANVAS, 40 BY 36 INCHES

mixed with love and loss, yielding a cathartic and emotionally cleansing afterglow.

The hooded figures in her paintings are surrounded by emphatic gestural fields of bravura brushstrokes variously in black, blue, white, and red, color-coding bruises, compassion, violence, and blood, mixed in proportions that determine the emotional mood in which each painting works. To blacken her blacks, she smeared them with tar, then used a blowtorch, showing how black is the aftermath of fire. She controlled the flame, watchfully, as it licked the surface, and decided to extinguish it with her breath, instinctively choosing the moment when a saving human presence appears fleetingly amid dangerous shadows. Viewed from different perspectives, light hitting the surfaces exposes skeletal hints of eyes, nose, and mouth, creating a ghostly visage. Packard bluntly told me, "Yeah, I'm angry." She is aware her sympathies are intimate and close. "But I don't tell the viewer what

to feel. I feel my truth and ask what others feel."

She has spent thousands of hours painting in her Bradford Street studio, at the foot of the steep road leading to the town's elementary school, which her children attended. When they first were born, they napped in her backpack while she painted. When they were older, they came into her studio after school, hanging out and doing their homework in an atmosphere of serious fun.

For four years, Packard has also maintained a studio in Brooklyn along the shore of the East River, between the Brooklyn Bridge and the Manhattan Bridge Overpass, a once-industrial area now being utilized as public parks for the growing population of residents. In her painting *Brooklyn Bridge*, the Manhattan skyline crowds tightly, almost stunted, as a dark, throbbing mass under the span of the majestic bridge. The structure appears spider-thin in a blue atmosphere that is strangely illuminated by white clouds, blurring the midpoint, implying, without showing, that

the bridge connects the boroughs. The area draws the eye into a vortex where the city's energy finds release in the freedom of the open sky.

Packard did a series of fifteen or so paintings right on the river, in a vacant lot. Her days in Provincetown had made her aware of images and sounds that inspire her: the constant movement of water as the bow of a vessel carves a path, the water heaving as waves dissipate, the rumble of trains underground, the sight of people bustling on streets, oblivious to planes flying overhead. A chain-link fence surrounded the forsaken space, littered with debris, including shards of heavy glass that she used as a palette on which to mix her paints. She had to hoist her canvases and materials to the other side of the fence and then climb over. For months, she painted in public without bother. One day, a policeman approached: "Hey, lady, you're trespassing. Get out or we're going to arrest you." Wearing her white hoodie, she scrambled over the fence. Luckily, her studio was nearby and the building had a freight elevator.

Great-granddaughter of the turn-of-the-last-century Impressionist painter Max Bohm, Packard remembers that when she was little and living in Princeton, New Jersey, her mother, painter Anne Packard, took her by train to New York, where the artist's estate was stored in large vaults. One day, a vault was opened and Cynthia helped pull out mural-size paintings—some 20 by 30 feet, awing her with the example of the artist's talent and the evidence of his paintings done in Paris, Provincetown, and New York.

Graduating with honors, she received a degree in sculpture from the Massachusetts College of Art, and then, at nineteen years old, returned to Provincetown, not sure she would become a sculptor. Crucially, for three years she had the experience of posing as a model for Fritz Bultman, a painter, sculptor, and draftsman highly regarded for the swelling volumes of his figures studies. The studio was fitted with clerestory windows, letting in the light high behind Bultman's easel. Packard, while she was being drawn, could actually see Bultman work in the mirroring reflections. She understood that she was a sculptural form and witnessed her transformation into two-dimensional vitality.

She posed for three-hour sessions, Bultman always using the same 24-by-30-inch Strathmore paper. They would "chat about our passions," Packard told me on a visit to her Provincetown studio. "He made thousands of lines, which he would spend much time erasing." The erasures are evident in the varying tones of smudges, and the pentimenti of the effort to make the work are retained in its final form. Occasionally, Bultman was seized by an impulse to add another sheet of paper—if, for instance, the leg of his model was emerging beyond the available edges. As he worked, Bultman drifted in and out of speech and silent sketching, Cynthia absorbing the rhythms of active mark-making and



BROOKLYN BRIDGE, 2012, OIL ON CANVAS, 60 BY 60 INCHES

the rich quiet of long periods of reflection. Bultman became her most important mentor. After three years of modeling, he said abruptly, "You go find us a model and I'm going to teach you how to draw." For the last four years of Bultman's life, Packard was his only student, learning the importance of the removal of lines, revision of gesture, and radical reorientation of geometry.

In Packard's own periodic workshops, one of which I attended last fall, she likes to begin by orienting her small group to a large sheet of toothy drawing paper and a thick stub of charcoal, available for their taking. The sheets are placed on the floor, an easel, or a drawing board, and Packard asks students to regard the space and "investigate" how they would make a simple division that touched two edges, using a free-drawn straight line, without intended curves. In the figure-drawing workshop I attended, a nude model sat ready to pose while Packard prepared us for the task by discussing the first issue about composition, not of the figure but of the available space in which the figure would be drawn. One student in the workshop, a graphic designer from Boston, spoke about using the designer's grid as the box

to break out of. Packard went from drawing to drawing, pointing out the strengths, weaknesses, and possibilities of energizing the compositional field. Discussions erupted about how each division could suggest ways to compose the figure. Packard turned drawings upside down and sideways, remarking, "See, everything is moving."

With characteristic drama, Packard was making the point that plasticity begins in geometry and composition. The initial orientation is like the first step in a journey, defining the direction. Just as there are four points on the compass, so there are four edges on the surface of the painter's two-dimensional universe, a completely fictive space that yet corresponds, not exactly, but with an echoing truth, to the three-dimensional world.

"The most important thing," she said to the assembled students, "is the edges. That's your entire world, that's the battleground. So your first question is how to deal with those four edges. The rectangle is like another person. I do something to that surface, and then it says something back to me. I reply to that, and the canvas replies to me. So I'm actually having a very personal conversation. It's always about losing the idea, losing the line and

finding the line, about letting things be revealed."

We see this technique in Packard's early figurative work, in which her still lifes and figures—including those of women and her own children—display the importance of color and line.

This summer, Packard will exhibit recent paintings of the Provincetown fishing fleet, done on-site and depicting the vessels in port, their sloping lines tethered to MacMillan Pier. One day, while she was working, a large painting blew into the water, taking the easel with it. A fishing boat happened to be passing by and grabbed the two with a gaff. Water splashing as a boat goes by, hitting the painting, she said, becomes part of the painting.

She would keep the essentials of a studio-on-the-wharf in the back of her car. She described the scene to me: "I brought out my huge easel, my entire table, paints, brushes, and blowtorch. It's a scene. The sunlight is shifting, I can't really see, the wind is blowing. It's not like I am painting the boats. My son is steadying the easel as I work. I am the boat, I am the wind, I am the sun, and I am the water—fully present, *there*." ☀

CHRISTOPHER BUSA is editor of Provincetown Arts.

Elspeth Halvorsen

AN INTIMATE COSMOS

By Susan Rand Brown

ELSPETH HALVORSEN IS to visual art as Emily Dickinson is to poetry: the voice of heavenly silence and cathedral tunes. There is a tone that attends to the allegorical and the burnished—the eternal—set in stone. Yet with Halvorsen there is also inclusion of the here and now: war and disruption, ecological disaster, violence toward women, the pain of separation and death.

Since the 1960s, Halvorsen has been creating complex, three-dimensional stage sets she calls “boxes,” framed mixed-media environments, hanging and freestanding. This rich vein of working is referred to as assemblage, sculptural collage, diorama, and “cabinet of curiosities,” describing the nineteenth-century passion for displaying objects associated with exotic voyages.

Rather than an evolution from one “style” to another, her creative process is more a back-and-forth, between colloquial narrative emphasizing intimate scale (and the use of small objects, which she makes, finds in antique stores, or receives from friends) and the grand vista, achieved through elemental, iconic shapes and a silver/gray palette that comprise her purest, most distinctive vocabulary: the circle (planets, moon, and sun) and the oval (the egg).

The intimate narrative and the wordless sublime are another way to position Halvorsen’s shifts between ways of working and seeing, echoing the ongoing twentieth-century dialogue between abstraction and figuration, the pendulum pausing someplace in between:



SATURN II, 1984, MIXED MEDIA, 19.5 BY 30 BY 3.5 INCHES

we see this in Halvorsen's real-world materials (tree branches, fragments of old wharves, horseshoe crabs, fish carcasses, a tortoise carapace, female torsos, pendulant chains, and swings) contextualized to share atmospheric space with burnished aluminum, used as a painterly medium. It would be difficult to overstate the tactile imprint of the Cape itself: the sea and the sky, the moon and the tides, the horizon line, the dunes, even shifting grains of sand.

Ladders and swings, threaded through Halvorsen's substantial body of work, carry their own iconography. She describes these mysterious ladders as ways to reenter her memories of growing up, as well as her daughters' childhood (which mothers often experience as a second girlhood); the swing is an image of return; the ladder, a symbol of escape or adventure into the unknown. Persephone and Demeter come to mind, mother and daughter endlessly engaged in a ritual back-and-forth search for connection: the visit to a parallel world that lies underneath (the ladder), balanced by the return (the swing). Halvorsen's *The Whole World Is Watching* was made as a protest of the US bombing of Afghanistan after the 9/11 destruction of the World Trade Center. It incorporates both ladder and swing to evoke a sense of meditation and reflection on the ultimate frailty and vulnerability of the human condition.

Berta Walker, close friend of the artist and owner of the Berta Walker Gallery in Provincetown, showing Halvorsen's work, uses words like *compassion*, *feminine*, and *organic* when referring to Halvorsen's more narrative art. Walker has in mind *Afghan Pieta*, which features a framed newsprint photo of an ancient Afghan woman cradling an infant, centered within a shuttered shrine that contains a hidden music box (the viewer may wind it to play Brahms's *Lullaby*), and *The Whole World Is Watching*, showing a cast female torso sheltered from flying warriors (a flotilla of horseshoe crabs, poised to strike). The Berta Walker Gallery will show these pieces, which portray the artist's "other side," as Walker puts it, complementing Halvorsen's solo exhibit this year at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum (PAAM). Speaking of a small fish included in her own Halvorsen box, Walker notes with wonder how "an object so small can be so monumental in its impact."

Robert J. Lifton, pioneer in the application of psychology and psychoanalysis to the field of history, admires the visionary quality of Halvorsen's art and in particular *Gothic Picnic*, a piece he owns. Two empty chairs sit at either end of a table under a solitary ball of light, denoting human alienation. In a letter to the artist, Lifton described his professional as well as personal relationship to the work, which will be on loan during Halvorsen's exhibit at PAAM:

The Elspeth Halvorsen Box has iconic significance in my life. Each time I begin the Wellfleet meetings on psychology and history which I convene annually, I have it hanging in view in my study. I point to its chairs at the empty table and the mysterious ball of light above. It signifies for us the beginning of our task, that of filling the emptiness with words and ideas in a quest for illumination. The construction is the only work of art I take with me from city to city so that it can carry out its special task.



GOTHIC PICNIC, 1987, MIXED MEDIA, 15 BY 30 BY 4 INCHES COLLECTION ROBERT J. LIFTON

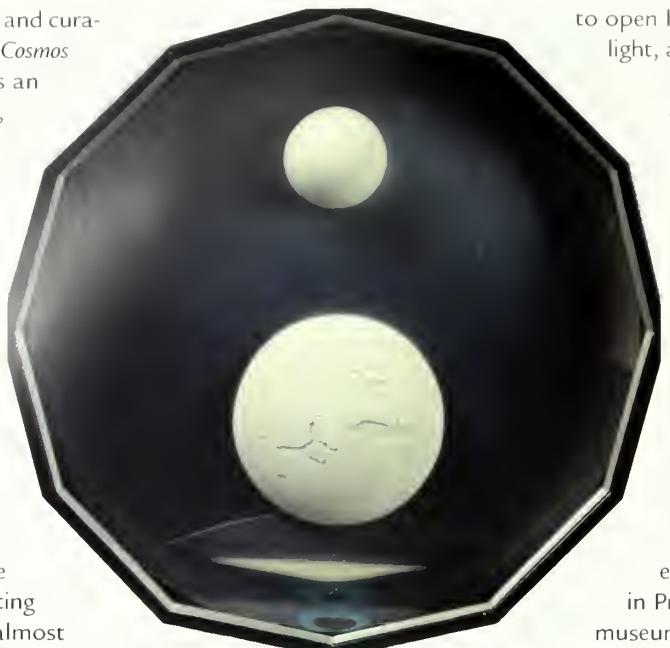


TWILIGHT CELEBRATION, 1982, MIXED MEDIA, 32 BY 21.5 BY 3.5 INCHES

Varujan Boghosian, well-known sculptor and curator of Halvorsen's PAAM exhibit, *An Intimate Cosmos* (May 31–July 7), intends this exhibition as an extended homage rather than a career survey, and plans to include *Gothic Picnic*, a piece he, too, greatly admires. "The absence of the figure is like an altar-piece without the arches," he told me. Boghosian also speaks of Halvorsen's integrity and "spectacular simplicity . . . There is a purity in the work of certain artists, like Myron Stout, Naum Gabo, and Elspeth Halvorsen—looking at their work [we sense] a quality of light, a feeling of distance and space." Even the titles are evocative: other pieces Boghosian selected emphasize a cosmic silence, including *Mother Moon*, *Transit*, and *Time and Silence*, Minimalist masterpieces in which life as we know it is stripped to its elements: floating circles, horizon, tides, and the air we can almost breathe, buoyed within a soft and changing light.

Halvorsen's is an art form closely linked to Dada and Surrealism: though not widely exhibited, sculptural assemblages by Joan Miró, Max Ernst, and Marcel Duchamp, meticulously balanced compilations of objects that read like dreams, make the point. Joseph Cornell is the best-known name within this genre. A generous sampling of Halvorsen's singular, visionary pieces was shown in *Image in the Box: From Cornell to Contemporary* at the Hollis Taggart Galleries in Manhattan (November 2008–January 2009), positioning her constructions with those by Cornell, Pierre Roy, Lucas Samaras, and others.

Halvorsen was unaware of Cornell's work when, spending winters in Indiana doing landscape paintings and studying photography in the late 1960s (her husband held a position as art historian at Purdue University in Indiana from 1964 into the late 1980s) she happened to see a friend's experiment with a three-dimensional box construction. It was a Eureka moment: immediately she recognized the potential of the box as a vehicle, a stage in which to create a story, an imaginary world. "I went home and immediately started making constructions: it was a revelation, the possibilities seemed infinite," she says, "and I've been doing it ever since." Eventually the boxes developed strategic openings, or "portholes" in their roofs and walls where a beam of light would focus upon the interior stage. With mirrors and other metallic reflecting surfaces, she was able



(TOP) MOTHER MOON, 1986, MIXED MEDIA, 24 BY 24 BY 4 INCHES
 (ABOVE) DAUGHTERS OF THE MOON, 1988, MIXED MEDIA, 36 BY 21.5 BY 4 INCHES

to open her boxes to a third dimension of space, light, and, later, music.

From the vantage point of Provincetown arts, it is not possible to consider Halvorsen's importance, as artist and center of a family of artists, without including her well-known family. There is artist-daughter Tabitha Vevers, who in 2009 was given a mid-career retrospective at the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum (traveling to PAAM), and has shown her work extensively. Documentary photographer Stephanie Vevers, the older daughter, makes her home in New York.

Halvorsen's husband, Tony Vevers (1926–2008), remains the center of her life and art. Sharing a circle of friends, they exhibited together from their earliest years in Provincetown; then, from the early 1990s, museums and galleries deliberately showed their work side by side (the Cape Cod Museum of Art mounted *Two Themes: Elspeth Halvorsen and Tony Vevers*

in 1991); the synchronicity of geometric shapes, light, and coloration is startling. When a stroke in 1994 impeded Vevers's mobility, they remained inseparable. Halvorsen entering gallery openings alongside Vevers with his cane and, ten years later, in a wheelchair was a common sight; it would always be Tony and Elspeth. For a period of time after Vevers's stroke, Halvorsen constructed a series of boxes titled *Waiting I, II III, IV*, containing low-relief metal birds in profile, emblems of hope and waiting, which seem to pull in light. Her exhibit at PAAM is dedicated to the memory of her late husband.

A Vevers painting—with its unornamented, flattened forms, usually figures set within a muted landscape, each equally important (or equally unobtrusive)—is often described as radiating luminosity, achieved through thinly applied paint: that these two artists grew together in their search for the spiritual dimension in art is no surprise. To talk to Elspeth now is to experience Tony's close presence. Her voice lifts when she speaks of him; death has not severed their lifeline.

Their home is filled with family art and photographs spanning four generations. During late summer and fall 2012, we sat down to talk in the brightly lit living room of their modest home in the East End of Provincetown, off Bradford Street, purchased in the mid-1960s from artist Mark Rothko, a story unto itself. A young Elspeth

and Tony were alerted to the property by Jack and Wally Tworkov. "The house was set far from the street, and in the middle of a treeless, sandy yard," is how the eighty-four-year-old Halvorsen describes their first look at this hidden property, which, a half century later, now sheltered by lilac bushes and tall pine trees, retains an aura of New England humility.

The house had a large "artist's studio" (Rothko's) on the second floor; a second studio was added for Halvorsen. Rothko was very eager for the artist-couple to buy his house ("He didn't like living so far from New York, that's why he sold the house"), even offering a second mortgage. Money for the down payment came from the sale of one of Vevers's significant early paintings to Modernist architect Charles Zehnder. "Rothko was very good to us: he was inclined to befriend younger artists. He said, 'But one of the things you have to promise is that you'll never change the kitchen,' so narrow you can hardly turn around. We promised," Halvorsen said with a laugh. The kitchen remains as it was.

She and Vevers met while both were visiting Maine's isolated, rocky Monhegan Island, long known as an artists' haven. When Halvorsen was twenty-two, she was in Paris studying at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, and then became, as she puts it, "very ill with pleurisy" upon returning. After six months in a hospital in White Plains, New York, not far from her family home in Purdys, New York, her mother suggested going to Monhegan Island to regain her strength. So in July 1953, mother and daughter, both artists, set off to paint.

"The first night we arrived," she explained, "everyone was invited to a 'dance evening' given at the tiny school building. As soon as we sat down, three young artists [Vevers, Stephen Pace, and another] walked in. Tony had on a cowboy hat, a kerchief, and cowboy boots. My mother said something like, 'The Three Musketeers: which one do you like?' And I said, 'The cowboy, the one in the middle.' The next thing I knew, Tony came over to ask me to dance. Six weeks later, we were married."

"He had come there to paint," she told me. "Together, we started to do woodcuts on the island. I had never done woodblocks before. He had his tools and ink rollers with him, but no ink. We found some old boards lying around; Tony made ink from the 'jelly' of the local seaweed, pressing it to get the jelly out, and combining it with ordinary ink. We carved several woodblocks and printed them. I still have the prints; I also have the blocks. One of his is of us standing together under a moon. Mine is of a crab with long claws stretched out on the rocks."

Halvorsen stared into space for a moment before continuing. "Soon after Tony and I met, my mother had a bad fall and we had to leave the island—there was no doctor on Monhegan. Tony and I corresponded daily. He came to Purdys, and we then went to New York, where I was to continue my classes at the Art Students League. Tony had a studio in a loft on Delancey Street. On his second day home, he went to his Yale reunion. On his drive back he called to ask, 'Will you marry me?'"

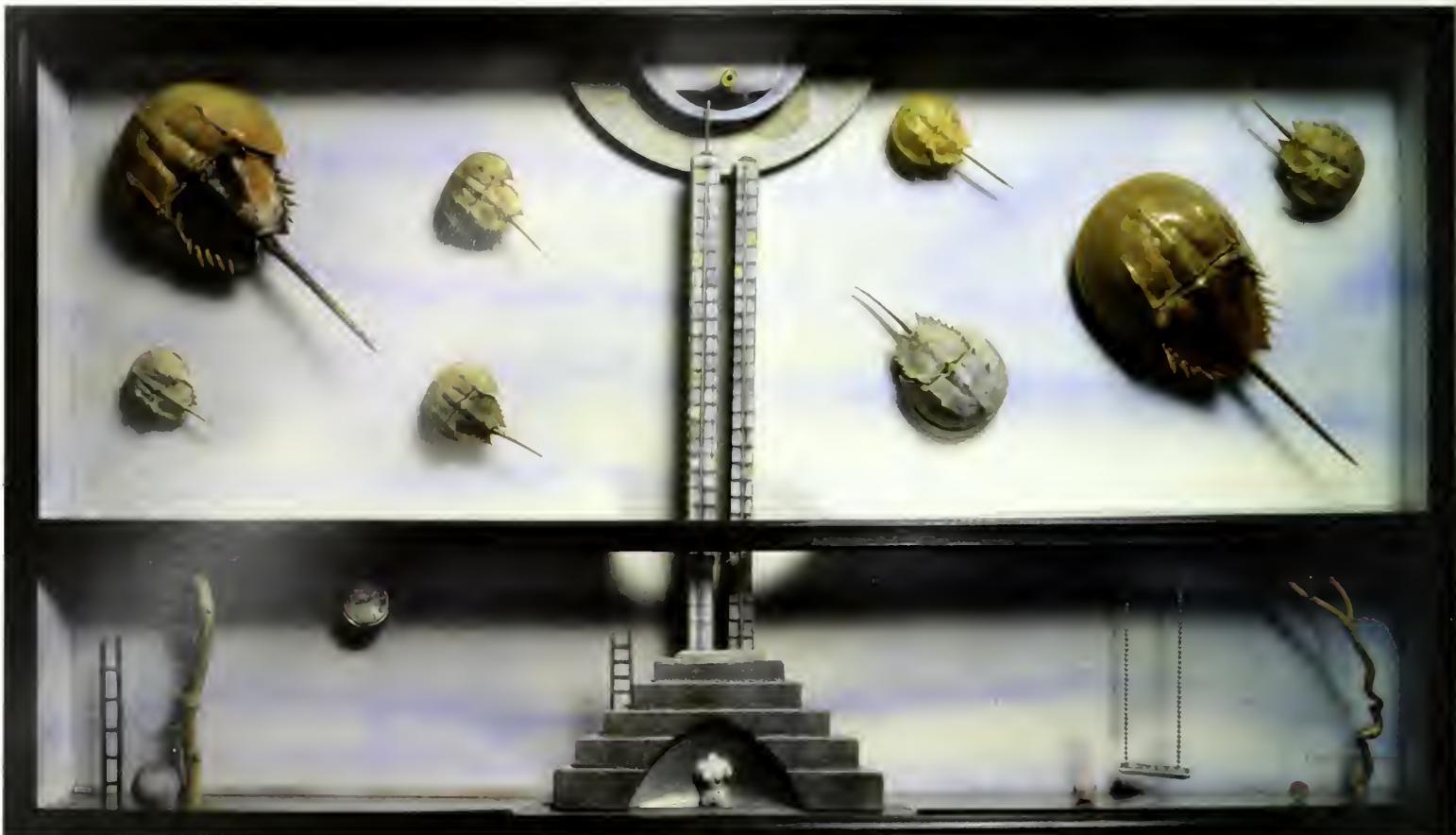
Even at this remove, her joy is tangible. "And I said 'yes' without a moment's hesitation. We were married in a church in Purdys a month later. My mother gave us a wedding party in the home I had grown up in." They then (illegally) moved into Vevers's loft, both finding work in the City Center Art Gallery, connected to connoisseur Lincoln Kirstein, an early beachhead within today's Lincoln Center arts complex.

A few months after the birth of Stephanie in 1955, they decided to leave Manhattan for the opportunity, arranged by Milton Avery, to live rent-free in a Provincetown house on the waterfront (now Bayside Betsy's). Halvorsen came to Provincetown on faith—Tony said it was an artists' community on the sea. In Provincetown, they reasoned, an artist could somehow survive, among artists and fishermen. It was a dream of a utopian community, away from the grit of urban life.

Once in Provincetown, a spirit of gentle optimism was as natural as the jugs of wine and endless fish dinner parties they shared with artist friends. Myron Stout (whose Minimalist aesthetic Halvorsen's is often compared to), Franz Kline, Jack and Wally Tworkov, Elise Asher and Stanley Kunitz, Edwin and Frances "Pat" Dickinson, Nat Halper and Marjorie Windust, Robert Motherwell, Milton Avery, and Hans Hofmann were a few of the painters and writers who welcomed Halvorsen and Vevers. The couple would spend a week each summer on the back shore, staying at Hazel Hawthorne's dune shack Thalassa, whose influence would later



TIME AND SILENCE, 1987, MIXED MEDIA, 48 BY 17 BY 4 INCHES



THE WHOLE WORLD IS WATCHING, 2001, MIXED MEDIA, 28 BY 50 BY 4 INCHES

be expressed in Halvorsen's work as dreamscapes of moonlight and shifting dune fields.

The Sun Gallery, on Commercial at the foot of Law Street, where the Vevers were then living, first opened in 1955, the year they arrived. Providing an alternative to the Abstract Expressionism favored by Nat Halper's HCE Gallery to its east, it attracted dynamic young artists. Founders Yvonne Andersen and Dominic Falcone showed Jan Müller, Alex Katz, Red Grooms, Robert Frank, Lester Johnson, Selina Trieff, Robert Henry, Josephine and Sal Del Deo, and others, including Halvorsen and Vevers, a generation drawn to the figurative paintings then out of fashion. Around this time, Vevers, who had been painting landscapes, started to include figures, with Halvorsen as his muse.

Hans Hofmann's presence loomed large: when local police threatened to close the Sun Gallery on the opening night of an exhibition of Vevers's figure drawings, Hofmann (with Hudson D. Walker) gathered enough signatures on Hofmann's hurriedly scribbled manifesto—more mini-lesson on the nude in Western art—to quiet the censors. The "manifesto," on a fragment of cardboard signed by all the major artists in town, has been kept with so much else that carries the Vevers's family history, and the art history of the town. Vevers was to become revered as the art historian of Provincetown; he and Halvorsen experienced much of this history firsthand for over a half century.

For Halvorsen, Vevers, and their friends, making art was what mattered; laboring jobs, while taking away from studio time, carried no stigma. Vevers, a Yale graduate, was grateful for construction jobs; Halvorsen, who during the 1950s and

'60s was doing landscape painting and portraits, mainly of children, accepted commissions from artist friends for practical things, such as designing slipcovers for Robert Motherwell. She worked during their first winter in the Portuguese Bakery accompanied by infant Stephanie, who slept in a cradle by her side. Bread was nineteen cents a loaf, and diapers were washed and hung near the ovens to dry—until the kindly owner objected. Sales of artwork were rare, and the recycled, the made-by-hand, a sensibility that remained a component of Halvorsen's (and Vevers's) art, was the guiding aesthetic and a practical norm.

A photo from this time shows the slender, delicate Halvorsen with daughters Tabitha and Stephanie in front and rear milk-carton bicycle-basket seats, which Halvorsen had assembled for the trio to get around town—to pay bills and to accept fish from the fisherman at the pier who enjoyed befriending artists.

This peek into the past, Halvorsen in front of a Commercial Street shop with Stephanie and Tabitha, presents this modest, soft-spoken yet determined artist in her element. She and Vevers were often sighted biking down Commercial as well. Even today, Halvorsen continues to get around town on her rusty bicycle, jumping on and peddling like a teenager.

The Sun Gallery closed in the early 1960s; for Halvorsen, it occupies a small line in a four-page résumé that includes solo and group exhibitions, honors and awards, and representation in museum collections. During the 1970s, she was involved with the Provincetown Group Gallery; in the late 1980s she founded Rising Tide Gallery,

This is a classic photo of my mother. Elspeth looks like a daimon fairy in the middle of her realm—we see the large-scale piece she's working on, and the tools, and a bit of her studio. The hammer in front of the piece reveals that she holds the power to create and destroy. The tips of her sneakers show the almost punk nature of her outlook, eschewing fashion and expense, and perhaps the continuum between studio and garden. The photo also shows her in all-white clothing, typical for much of her career. —Stephanie Vevers

(OPPOSITE) ELSPETH HALVORSEN IN HER STUDIO IN 1995, WITH HER SCULPTURE *ODYSSEY* PHOTO BY VINCENT GUADAZNO





LOVE LOCK, 2011, MIXED MEDIA, 7.5 BY 15.75 BY 3 INCHES

located on the ground floor of today's Schoolhouse Center for the Arts. The Long Point Gallery, where Vevers and many others were showing, including Judith Rothschild, Carmen Cicero, Varujan Boghosian, Paul Resika, Fritz Bultman, and Robert Motherwell, was on the building's second floor. When Long Point included nonmembers, Halvorsen's boxes were shown; she was invited to become a member in 1997. The building was sold later that year and both galleries were forced to close. Halvorsen was a staple at Tirca Karlis, the Cherry Stone, PAAM, the Cape Cod Museum of Art, and the Berta Walker Gallery. Numerous gallery permutations featured artists and their families working and showing together, sharing hangings, openings, and many picnics on the back shore.

Linking the generations through art and exhibitions is a familiar experience for Halvorsen. The most recent of these was *The Tides of Provincetown*, curated by the New Britain Museum of American Art in Connecticut, which traveled (2011–2012) to Wichita and Pittsburgh, and to the Cape Cod Museum of Art. Artworks by Tabitha Vevers, her husband, Daniel Ranalli, Tony Vevers, and Elspeth Halvorsen were hung in close proximity, emphasizing similarities and dissimilarities in materials (shells, horseshoe crabs, snails, sand, rope) and approach (classical references, scale). And there were other

family shows, including *Family Values: Tony Vevers, Elspeth Halvorsen, & Tabitha Vevers* (curated by Ranalli, Suffolk University, 2002), *The Vevers Family* (Berta Walker Gallery, 2009), and *Four Generations* (Rising Tide Gallery, 1991), which featured Halvorsen with her daughter Tabitha; her mother, landscape painter Colette Finch Pratt (1902–2001); and her maternal grandmother, British figurative artist Rene Finch Sund (1876–1954). Sund spoke out for the "modern" movement in art and is noted as a voice for women's greater inclusion in London's lively post-World War I gallery scene in Katy Deepwell's scholarly text *Women Artists Between the Wars* (Manchester University Press, UK, 2010), alongside Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell. The generations of women artists linked through Halvorsen were included as well in the mid-'90s traveling exhibit *Relatively Speaking: Mothers and Daughters in Art*.



(ABOVE) STEPHANIE (LEFT) AND TABITHA VEVERS, c. 1960 PHOTO BY TONY VEVERS
 (RIGHT) ELSPETH HALVORSEN AND TONY VEVERS, PROVINCETOWN, 1986 PHOTO BY RENATE PONSON

My mother became swept away by photography when my sister, Stephanie, and I were in elementary school. She had always been a painter, from before she met my father, Tony Vevers, through their early days together in New York and then on the Cape. One day, after my father had started teaching at Purdue University in Indiana, she signed up for a photography course. The next thing we knew, she brought home a Rolleiflex camera and converted the bathroom into a makeshift darkroom. Returning home from school, I'd often have to call out, "Mum, is it safe?" and wait to catch her between prints in order to open the door to pee. I would be greeted by the smell of chemicals, the subdued amber glow of the safe light, and my mother's excitement at the magic of an image conjured out of silver on paper.

The spare midwestern countryside was foreign and fresh to all of us. During her photographic excursions, Mum became friendly with a farmer and his wife and their gritty, yet gracefully tended sheep farm. She eventually

FROM SILVER TO ALUMINUM



ROCKING HORSE, c. 1967

created an artist's book documenting its somber transformation from homestead to gravel pit. As I look back, it was a transformation that foreshadowed her own transition from photography to ceramics to sculpture, from narrative to a kind of symbolic abstraction. Those enormous mounds of gravel reappear in the loose sand of her later box constructions.

My all-time favorite photograph of hers, titled Rocking Horse, presages the symmetry and shallow space of the worlds she would begin to create with aluminum, sand, and found objects. The arch formed by the horse's body, the swirl of his neck against his torso, the intensity of his eye as the center point of the image, and the grid of the wire fence are all echoed in the curves, spheres, glass lenses, windows, and ladders of her sculpture. Indeed, the silver-coated paper that is used in black-and-white photography finds its analogue in the burnished aluminum and near-monochrome palette that have been the most consistent elements in her work over the past forty-five years.

—Tabitha Vevers



(LEFT TO RIGHT) ELSPETH WITH HER DAUGHTERS, TABITHA AND STEPHANIE, 2012. PHOTO BY IRENE LIPTON

Through the long, cold Provincetown winters, Halvorsen remains busy in her studio, often finding inspiration in boxes that call to be dismantled and reassembled. The genius of assemblage involves a constant openness to transformation of the ephemeral. I am reminded of something Vevers said in an interview with Townsend Ludington in

the mid-1990s about his own process, working with collage during a time when he was disassembling (literally cutting out parts of) earlier work, using strips of painted canvas to evoke a sense of geological time. In Vevers's case, what mattered was the layering, the nod to earlier inspiration as a means of invoking history, material or personal; an especially poignant journey when what lies beneath remains unseen.

Throughout her half century of making boxes, Halvorsen too has continued to invoke this spirit of pentimento. To treasure Tony's memory, and to unite their work, Elspeth has recently salvaged scraps of watercolor paintings from his studio that he had torn and saved from their Monhegan days, perhaps for future collages.

When we view her oeuvre from a distance, from landscape and portraiture to the luminous tonalities and shapes that seem to emerge from spools of memory, we can feel this bedrock of family connection, layered firmly and lovingly throughout her work. ■

SUSAN RAND BROWN profiled the painter Lillian Orlowsky for the 2004/5 issue of Provincetown Arts, and has since written about artists Ellen LeBow, Barbara E. Cohen, Mike Wright, Sky Power, Marion Roth, Breon Dunigan, and Christina Schlesinger. Brown began writing about the arts in the 1970s, and has profiled many of the Outer Cape's major artists for the Provincetown Banner (and its predecessor, the Provincetown Advocate). She has spent summers in her family's Commercial Street home since the 1960s.

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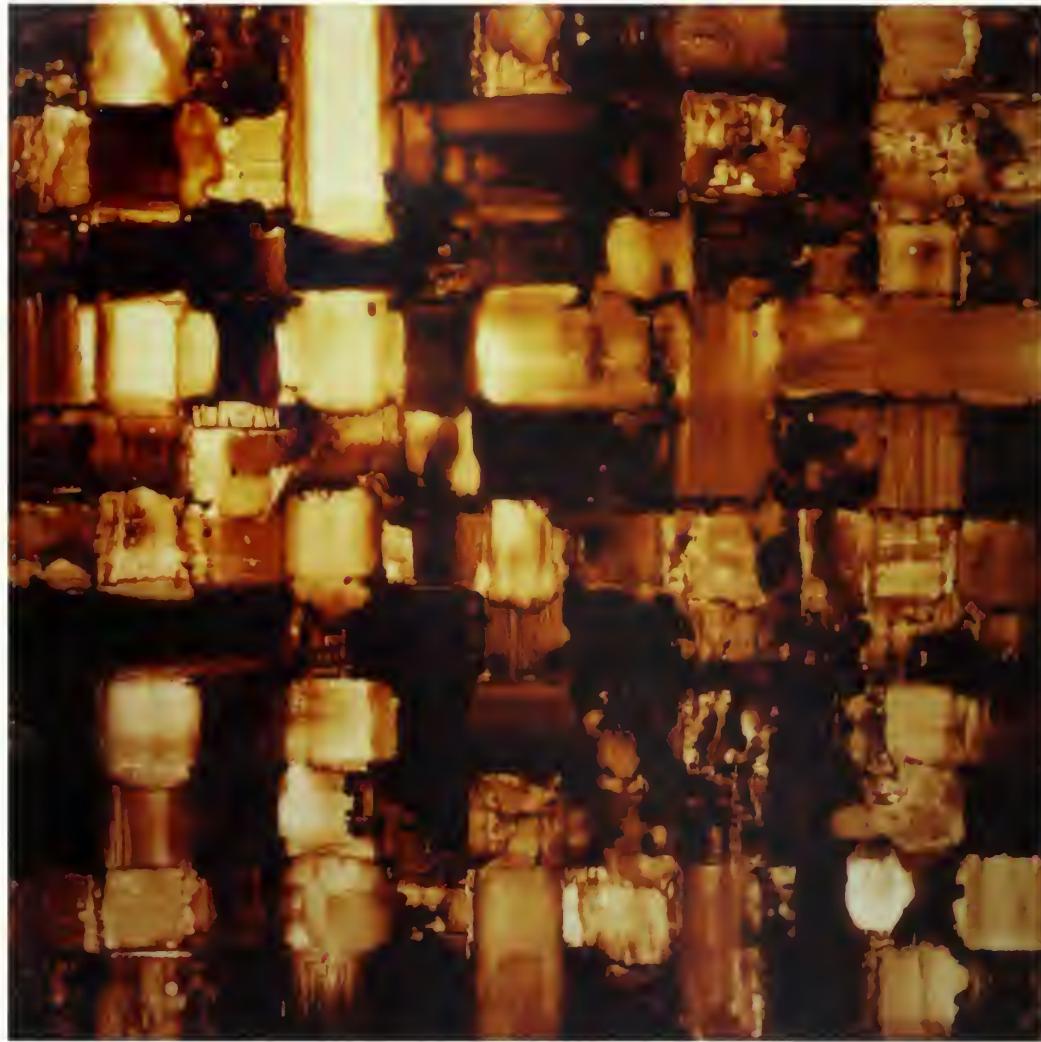
July 12 - August 1:
Timothy Woodman Tabitha Vevers

August 2 - 22:
Paul Bowen Irene Lipton

August 23 - September 12:
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LAST LIGHT, 1997, ASPHALTUM AND SHELLAC ON LINEN, 42 BY 42 INCHES PRIVATE COLLECTION

James Balla

POWER OF THE SQUARE

By Christopher Busa

AMES BALLA'S MID-CAREER retrospective, *Into the Blue Again*, on view this summer at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum (June 28 through August 11), is a welcome opportunity to trace the intelligent evolution of his paintings over nearly three decades. Balla has lived in Provincetown since graduation from the Parsons School of Design in New York in 1985, when, instead of going to the ceremony for his degree, he and his partner, Albert Merola, "jumped in the car and drove to Provincetown." His diploma was mailed to him. He had majored in sculpture, welding large metal pieces too unwieldy for his first small studio. He had always painted and drawn. "I shifted over," Balla told me. "By the early nineties, I had a body of work I believed in."

Balla partnered with Merola to start Universal Fine Objects in 1988; when Balla's career direction had become established, they changed the name to the Albert Merola Gallery. Now Balla could further focus attention on painting. The gallery roster includes artists historically important to Provincetown, such as Fritz Bultman, Lester Johnson, and Michael Mazur, and artists on the contemporary cutting edge, including Helen Miranda Wilson, Duane Slick, Richard Baker, Jack Pierson, and John Waters. I wondered if these artists shared a common aesthetic, and Balla said, "Albert and I make decisions that must reflect our tastes. One unifying thing would be their sense of integrity and the high level of their work. Within that, there is a range." And, beyond that, all have strong ties to Provincetown.

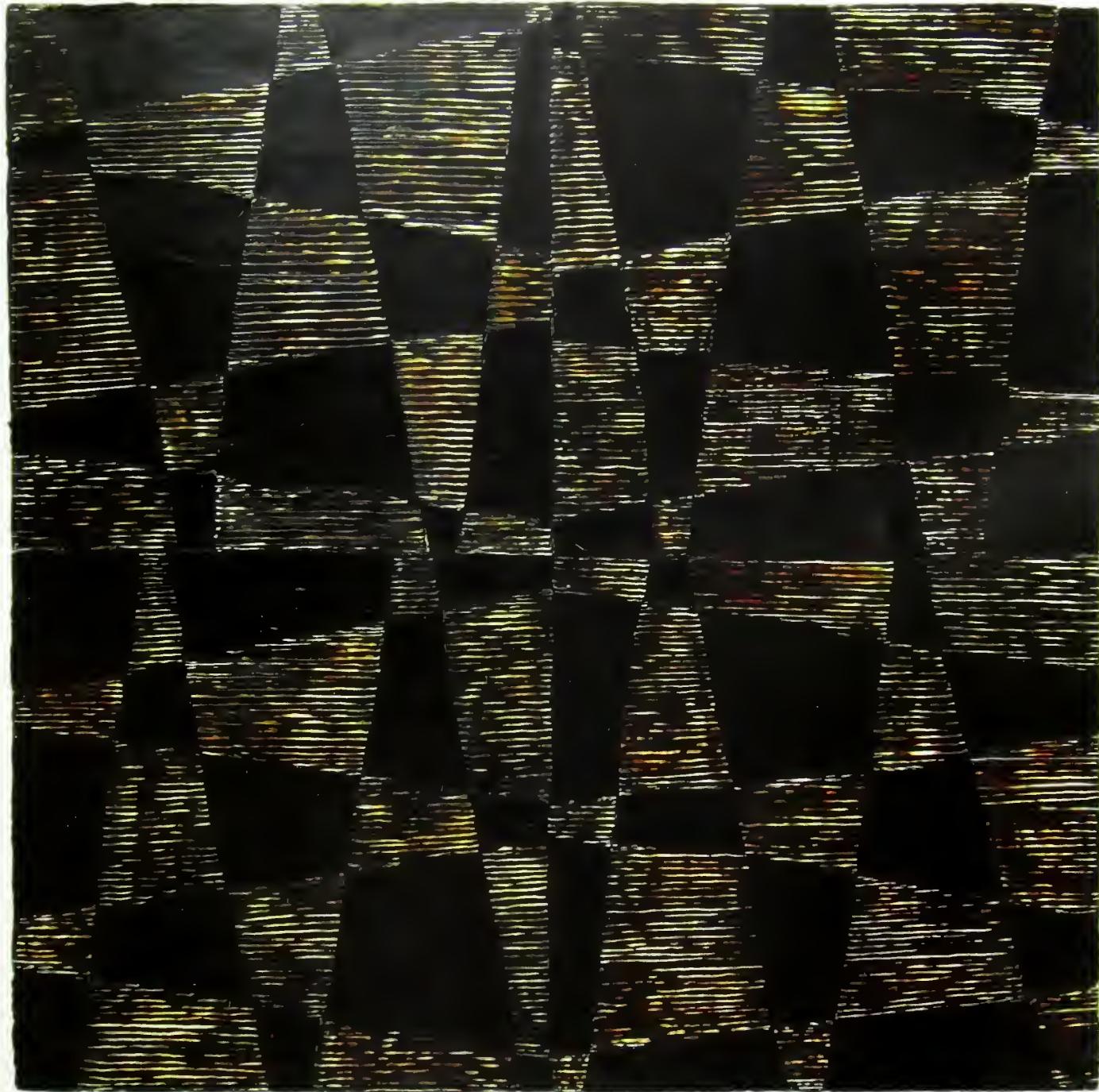
Balla chose to open his exhibition with an introspective self-portrait, deftly sketched in number-two pencil sometime in 1978. Balla said, "It was done at a point of real reevaluation in my life and a determination to pursue art." He was developing a lifelong habit of seldom using an eraser when he drew. His features are finely rendered: almost every hair on his head is drawn; the eyes, steady, keen, and quiet, exude a sense of determination. Balla had taken a class with the artist Ann Chernow at Norwalk Community College in Connecticut. She and her husband, Burt Chernow, author of monographs on Christo and Lester Johnson, would remain important influences. Ann had secured funds from the college to take her

class to New York to buy a small painting or a photograph, as an experience that would broaden their understanding of how the art market works. Balla watched in the back room at the OK Harris gallery, owned by the cigar-smoking impresario Ivan Karp, as an agreement to buy a photograph was closed. Chernow taught Balla how to prepare a portfolio for presentation to a gallery. She also counseled, "If you are going to become an artist, it will never be easy to earn a living. But if you are going to do it, be serious."

This lesson was reinforced later during drawing classes Balla had at Parsons with Sean Scully, who was then receiving his first important acclaim. Like many good teachers, Scully did not want

to encourage imitators of his work; rather, he coached his students in life lessons about how to survive, psychologically, when confronting the "maze" that is the developing artist's bewilderment. Scully advised, "You are in the forest. Don't panic. Decide to walk. Choose something and build, add, go deeper. See what it is." Balla made a decision to organize his maze within a square format, a limitation that he believes increases his freedom. As far back as elementary school, he had made little models in square shapes.

Let us look at the significantly titled *The Source*, an oil on canvas painted in 1992. Within the square, there are no squares. Each quadrilateral is irregular, and there are no true trapezoids,



THE SOURCE, 1992, OIL ON LINEN, 48 BY 48 INCHES

resembles, kites, or parallelograms. The shapes refer less to geometry than to the organic pulse that animates the matrix of lights and darks, which can seem to be blinking with illumination from horizontal pixels of LED light coming from behind the black screen. This effect came as a consequence of Balla's giving up on a painting in which he'd lost his way. The surface was thick with colored pigments. Balla took a big brush and obliterated the memory by covering the surface in black. He saw how forms could emerge out of nothing. Using a stick, Balla incised the striations, scraping away the black paint, and creating shapes that echo and mimic in white what the blacks do in black. Shapes blend their edges into each other, connecting the matrix with an organic, web-like netting.

Five years later, Balla painted *Last Light*, using the grid-like ranks and files of a chessboard, giving each square its character in relation to adjacent squares. If *The Source*, with its lively play of quadrilaterals, pointedly avoids any equality among its four-sided fragments, *Last Light* employs the square as a means of examining itself. Each square is worked and reworked, slowly achieving individual identity while functioning in moving relation to the whole. While he is working, Balla sometimes



SELF-PORTRAIT, 1978-79, GRAPHITE ON PAPER, 19 BY 15 INCHES

thinks painting has a biological equivalent in how the human body heals after a wound, cell by cell—much the way he works on a painting. From years of drawing, he learned that the eraser is as much a tool as the pencil. In Balla's paintings, erasures

take place when he dips his brush in mineral spirits and exposes the glow of the bronze-colored shellac beneath the black. As concerned as Balla is with creating forms adjacent to each other, he also deals in various ways with the layering of his surface, and is able to mine the layers in a kind of visual texture.

In *Stoker*, painted in 2001, Balla made emphatic use of asphaltum, a medium he learned about when he worked with Michael Mazur and Robert Townsend on the New Provincetown Print Project in the early nineties at the Fine Arts Work Center. Asphaltum is commonly used as a ground in printmaking, and Balla took to the primal, tar-like substance with instinctive fascination—perhaps it sparked the idea that coal, compressed, can become diamonds. Such is the force of four simultaneous explosions. Very strong light pours out from each quadrant, the shape of each flash a cousin of the others. I told Balla that when I look at this painting, I smell sulfur. He replied, "Good paintings hit you like a smell, where you react before you even know what it is."

The quadrants of the square universally symbolize the four points on the compass: east, west, north, south; the four seasons of the year: winter, spring, summer, fall; the four elements in nature:



STOKER, 2001, ASPHALTUM AND SHELLAC ON LINEN, 14 BY 14 INCHES

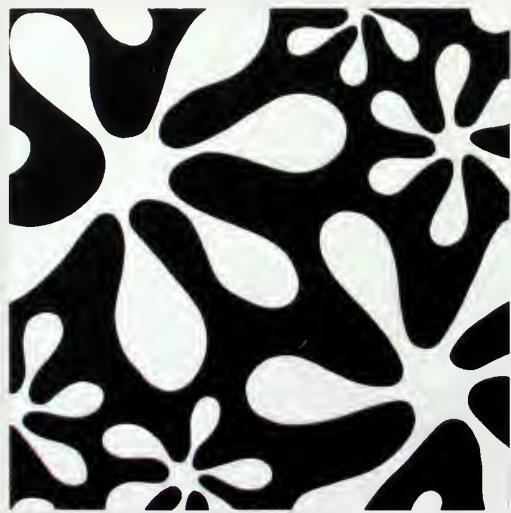
James Balla

BY JOHN WATERS

JAMES BALLA'S WORK hangs in both my New York and Baltimore bedrooms alongside many smart-ass contemporary bad boy artists (Mike Kelley, Richard Prince, Larry Clark) yet Balla also seems at home on these walls in his own friendly, un-ironic, but slightly druggy way. *Into the blue again* (2005) is like a jigsaw puzzle slipping off the table; a Franz Kline negative that has taken Warhol's *Shadows* on a trip to see Lichtenstein's *Imperfect* paintings and together they mock the unsophisticated public's distaste of "modern art." *Into the blue again* is a corridor that you are barred from entering but you don't mind

because the artist who led you there seems happy, confident, and refusing to join in any art movement, even "Op." Bridget Riley might not know of this work yet and John Armleder could be unaware of any influence but Balla doesn't seem to care—he's optimistic and cheerful even in the face of possible indifference, which always seems wrong-headed yet completely non-threatening.

Back and Forth (2010) could be a close-up cut-out from another Balla painting, *Hymn* (2009), maybe even its son. Both could be appropriated from industrial carpeting inside a trippy skating rink or the dome of a planetarium viewed high on poppers, better yet, upscale gift-wrap from a rave-party present so special the recipient would never demand to see what's inside. Is *Back and Forth* a mutant cousin to Warhol's *Flower* paintings or a clusterfuck of asterisks happily going to a Woodstock of punctuation points without ever revealing their footnotes? Can art that is funny and lighthearted and even as goofily beautiful as Balla's is here also be dead serious, intellectually superior, and oddly content to just hang there on the wall giving you quiet pleasure? Of course it can, silly. Just look at it.



BACK AND FORTH, 2010, OIL ON LINEN, 24 BY 24 INCHES
COLLECTION OF JOHN WATERS



INTO THE BLUE AGAIN, 2005, OIL ON LINEN, 14 BY 14 INCHES
COLLECTION OF JOHN WATERS

earth, air, fire, water; the four phases of life: birth, child, adult, death. The square eliminates associations with either the horizon line of the landscape or the vertical that implies an upright figure. The square format was Balla's declaration that his pursuit of abstraction would be as pure as possible.

When the artist Kazimir Malevich painted *Black Square* in 1915, he did so in a desire to exclude the personal by purifying the painting of any sentimental reference. Josef Albers's series *Homage to the Square* explored in over a thousand works how three or four colored squares, one laid over the other, could interact optically to produce an aura that Albers called "halation," the pulsing glow of a halo. Balla is more Minimalist in his colors, and his effects operate differently on the eye, concentrating less on color and more on the play of light sources to make his dark shapes visible.

Balla's current paintings are a fresh incantation of his interlocking cellular shapes, using clouds. If these paintings directly reference Pop Art, it is not through Roy Lichtenstein, but through a most personal source, since the new shapes are literally drawn from templates in the comic books Balla dwelled on as a boy. We were in Balla's studio speaking of the inspiration for this growing body of work and he remarked, "When I was little, I was in the backyard and wondering what artists hundreds of years ago, people like me in the act of observing, were thinking when they looked at the sky, and painted it."



SOMEDAY I'LL FIND IT..., 2012, OIL ON PANEL, 12 BY 12 INCHES



JAMES BALLA

Balla pulled open a drawer in one of his flat files, stuffed with comic books from his boyhood—he said there are around six hundred in his collection. We looked at the drawings, with Balla comparing a dialogue bubble with one of his cloud paintings. Balla chuckled, rather bemused by his own admiration and respect for the skill of these mostly anonymous artists. If Balla's earlier square paintings reference cells as facets of the whole, they also summon feelings of jail-like isolation, separation, and loneliness. Balla now explores the square, not as a maze one is confined in, but as a window open to the sky with the freedom of clouds to take their shape from the wind that moves them. He leaves out any dialogue or any action of figures.

Someday I'll find it . . ., painted last year, is a square divided diagonally between an upper field of brilliant blue and a steep hill of boulder-like shapes, whitish with an icy blue tint. Investigating the painting through its zen-like title, I saw the steep hill as the path Sisyphus was obliged to climb. The hill is not endless; there is a pinnacle. I see mature hope in this painting, and it helps me understand why Albert Camus declared in “The Myth of Sisyphus”: “One must imagine Sisyphus happy.” ▲

CHRISTOPHER BUSA is editor of Provincetown Arts.

THANASSI GALLERY

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Walking Along the Edge

Texts by Joanne Barkan

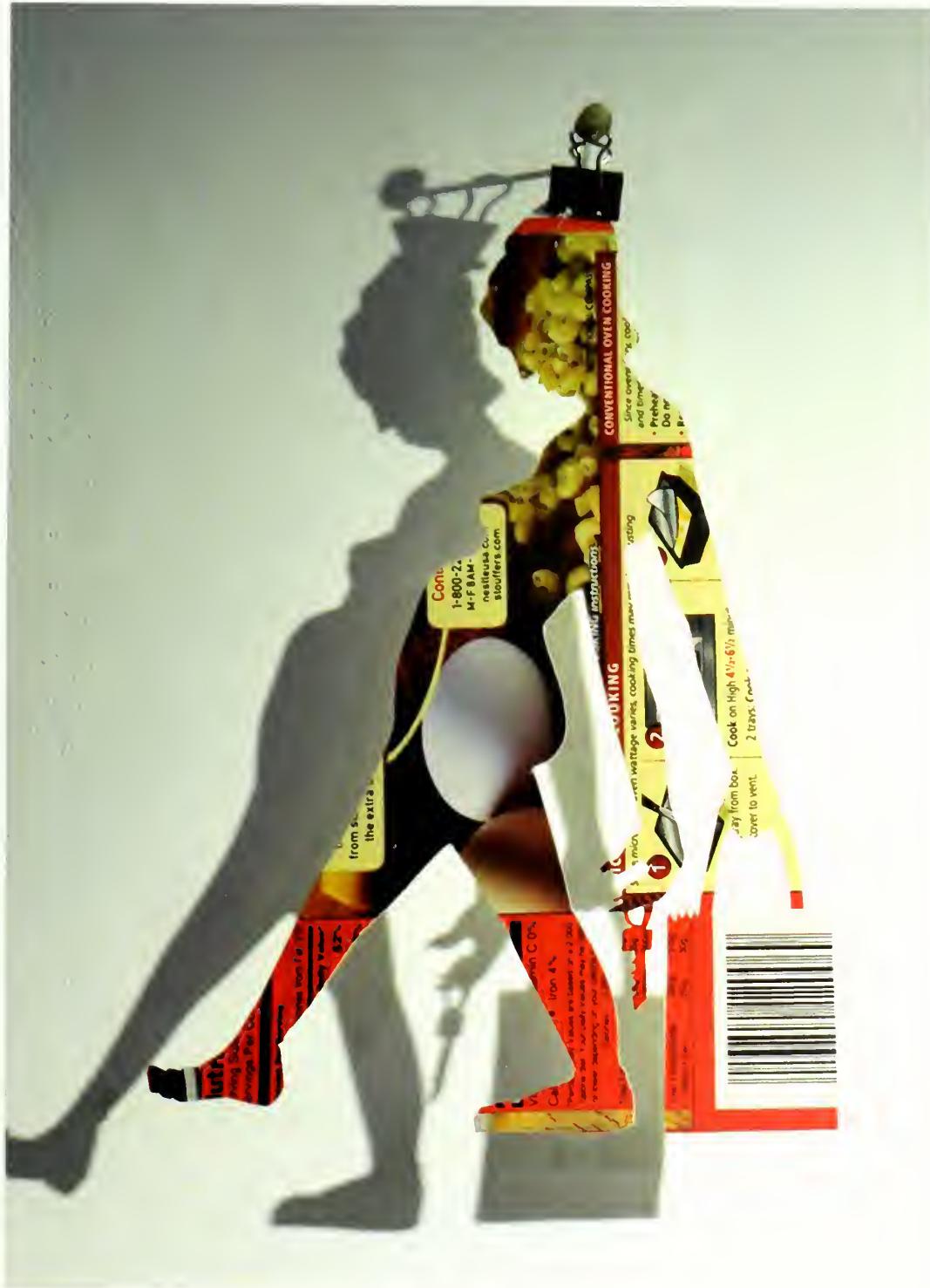
Art by Maryalice Johnston and Vicky Tomayko

WHEN I WRITE about Maryalice Johnston's or Vicky Tomayko's art, I try to create a scenario, a kind of thumbnail libretto, for each piece. To do this, I choose work that suggests a narrative to me. Even the hint of a possible story allows me to play with words until a text—usually in verse—evolves. I keep my wordplay as close as I can to the art (an image of the piece is on my computer screen while I work). I'm aiming for art and text to be a matched pair. The artist gives me the title of the piece, which is sometimes a place to start, sometimes not. But other than the title, I usually know nothing specific about what she was thinking while creating the piece. We work not only separately, but consecutively. My finished text needs the art, or a reproduction of it, to make sense, but the art can stand alone. This one-way relationship characterizes all ekphrastic writing (as the term is now used)—writing that tries to inhabit or speak to a work of visual art. Since Maryalice and Vicky are friends of mine, I always ask what they think of the texts that I've paired with their art. So far, so good.

—Joanne Barkan

Shopping Girl belongs to a sisterhood of silhouette characters whom Maryalice Johnston calls “the girls.” They reappear, singly or in groups, in her silk screens, collages, and cutout assemblages. I first saw this particular figure in a wall installation of a hundred or so cutouts at artSTRAND gallery in Provincetown. The piece immediately made me think of Lisbeth Salander, the female protagonist of Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* novels: intensely focused, walking fast, and fully prepared to carry out her latest plan. Maryalice says that she drew the figure on the back of a Stouffer's carton without knowing what it would look like when she turned it over. The result is quite the fortuitous arrangement of shapes and colors.

MARYALICE JOHNSTON & JOANNE BARKAN

**Girl With Tote Bag and Key**

Born on the back of a mac-and-cheese box,
with tote bag, one key, and a pair of hot socks,
she's got all that's needed to hatch out her plan
and walks deep in thought to a double-parked van.
Unflappable girl with the long swooping stride,
she'll handle her bag and whatever's inside.

SHOPPING GIRL, 2009, STOUFFER'S BOX CUTOUT, 8 BY 5.75 INCHES

Hutson GALLERY



"An Inherent Membrane of Focused Consumable Abstraction"
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In 2008 Vicky Tomayko began sending me jpg images of new monotypes along with their titles. Since then, I've written texts for over forty pieces. In Moon Over Me, I found the pink figure extremely appealing and terribly vulnerable. While spunky enough to put herself "out there," she seems to be suddenly caught in one of those and-then-I-realized-I-had-no-clothes-on dreams. The Forest Invaded by Hope flummoxed me until I saw biblical intimations in the division of the piece into a watery upper half and terrestrial lower half. The white dove above and the sea creatures below made me think of a partition still in progress. In Walking Along the Edge, the plucky creature perched on the diagonal seemed to be covered with scratches and cuts, its head bandaged. It turned out that the artist didn't have a battered creature in mind, and the band across the eyes is a blindfold. The noncongruity of artist's intent and writer's impression makes working with Vicky and Maryalice ever engaging.



Moon Over Me

I stare at the moon, disconcerted to see
that's me in my one-piece as late-night emcee.
Why am I up there? No joke list, no mike.
I'd quit this strange gig, but there's heavenly light.

VICKY TOMAYKO & JOANNE BARKAN



THE FOREST INVADED BY HOPE, 2009, MONOTYPE, OIL AND INK ON PAPER, 44 BY 30 INCHES



Walking Along the Edge

I choose to be bruised
when I walk on the edge.
The price of the thrill—
an occasional spill.
I'm scarred but not marred,
contused but enthused,
gored but not bored,
scraped but not scrapped.

WALKING ALONG THE EDGE, 2010, MONOTYPE, OIL AND INK ON PAPER, 30 BY 22 INCHES

The Forest Invaded by Hope

In the beginning, the land and the sea
were poorly divided and couldn't agree
on what would go where.
Then hope in the form of a dove and anemone
established two regions of equal hegemony,
and that cleared the air.

JOANNE BARKAN is a political essayist, member of the editorial board at *Dissent* magazine, and author of *Visions of Emancipation: The Italian Workers' Movement Since 1945*. She has also written over 120 books—in verse and prose—for young readers. She lives in Manhattan and Truro.

MARYALICE JOHNSTON is an artist working with mixed media to create paintings and installations. She is a founding and active member of artSTRAND, a Provincetown art gallery, and a member of BUTTER, a group of musicians experimenting with noise and sound.

VICKY TOMAYKO is an artist, teacher, and former Fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center. She uses thin layers of transparent color to create one-of-a-kind prints. Her work—at once narrative, humorous, and edgy—can be seen at the Schoolhouse Gallery in Provincetown.

David Davis

AND KENNEDY TO KENT STATE AT THE WORCESTER ART MUSEUM

By Jack Jarzavek

HERE ARE MANY joys to teaching in a private school, but perhaps the greatest is the close relationship between teachers and students, with a partnership in learning and often friendships that last a lifetime. I taught at the Rivers School in Weston, Massachusetts, for forty years, and many students have become valued and long-standing friends. One of these students, Howard Gay Davis III—"David" Davis, class of 1970—and I have shared a love of literature and the arts for nearly a half century. The bond we formed at Rivers was strengthened when he went to my undergraduate school, Wesleyan University, where his fascination with the visual arts expanded. Dave began an intense study of photography, printmaking, typography, and dance that would set him upon a direction that has governed his life as a collector, philanthropist, and artist in his own right.

I was not surprised when he amassed his collection of 120 iconic photographs of the late 1950s to early 1970s. The exhibition of his icons of photojournalism, *Kennedy to Kent State: Images of a Generation*, featured at the Worcester Art Museum this spring, culminates from Dave's many years of study of photography and expresses a deep, visceral connection to the events of his teenage years and early adulthood—a time in US history that shattered the tranquility of the '50s in which he was born and ushered in an era of malaise, doubt, skepticism, even distrust. Dave, however, emerged stronger for these experiences and out of the crucible of those times forged a life dedicated to art and to philanthropy.

For those of us who lived in this pivotal era, the photographs in the *Kennedy to Kent State* exhibit bring back to mind important historical events, often in a searingly painful way. The Kent State photo (1970) by John Paul Filo, which shows a young woman standing over the body of her dead friend, and the Nick Ut shot in Vietnam of children fleeing a napalm attack (1972), are as devastating now as they were when we first saw them in print. Other photos capture some of the transformative events of the era, such as the civil rights movement and space exploration, through Rowland Scherman's photo of Martin Luther King, Jr., speaking at Howard University (1966) and Buzz Aldrin's photo of Neil Armstrong planting the American flag on the moon (1969). But the key to the exhibit is the collection of Kennedy photos. From the iconic image of JFK walking in the dunes of Hyannisport (Mark Shaw, 1959), to the triumphant scene of his inauguration (Paul Schultzer, 1961), and the devastating portrait of his death in Abraham Zapruder's film of his assassination in Dallas (1963; four black-and-white frame stills are included in the collection), we go on a journey that is not just visual, but visceral and personal.

I remember staying up late into the morning the day after the 1960 election to hear the returns from California. Kennedy's election was a breath of fresh air, a promise of a new beginning. I was in Paris in 1961, a student at the Sorbonne, when the Kennedys visited with General De Gaulle. I stood in the front row on the Boulevard Saint-Michel to see Jack and Jackie sweep by in their motorcade, and a day later I was on the Champs Elysées to see them riding in a limo with De Gaulle. Though never as cynical as many of my college classmates, I had never been excessively patriotic. But seeing the Kennedys in Paris those two days made me



proud to be an American. As chance would have it, I was also overseas, in England, on November 22, 1963, when JFK was assassinated in Dallas, and for the next four days, I was glued to the television. The assassination of Lee Harvey Oswald by Jack Ruby, shown live on TV (caught by photographer Robert H. Jackson, and included in this collection), made me think the world had gone mad. People of my generation remember where they were on that day, just as my father remembered where he was when he heard about Pearl Harbor, or today's generation recall where they were during the September 11 attacks. It was the passing of an era. The assassination of John F. Kennedy marked us for life.

When I taught Dave and his classmates English, French, and art history, the Kennedy assassination would come up in conversation now and again. I was stunned to discover that these teenagers, who were just kids of eleven at the time of these events, remembered their teachers and parents crying and the images that crowded the television for days. We often talked about young John Kennedy, Jr., saluting his father, or the swearing in of Johnson with the dazed Jackie by his side—photos capturing both events are in the exhibition. By the late '60s, however, the Vietnam War would cloud our vision as we observed a futile war with so many young men dying as they did their duty as soldiers. By that time I was thirty and I could turn off the television or block out the news, but for Dave's generation, young men who might actually join those soldiers, the images of war were living and ever present. I was moved to see a number of images from that era at



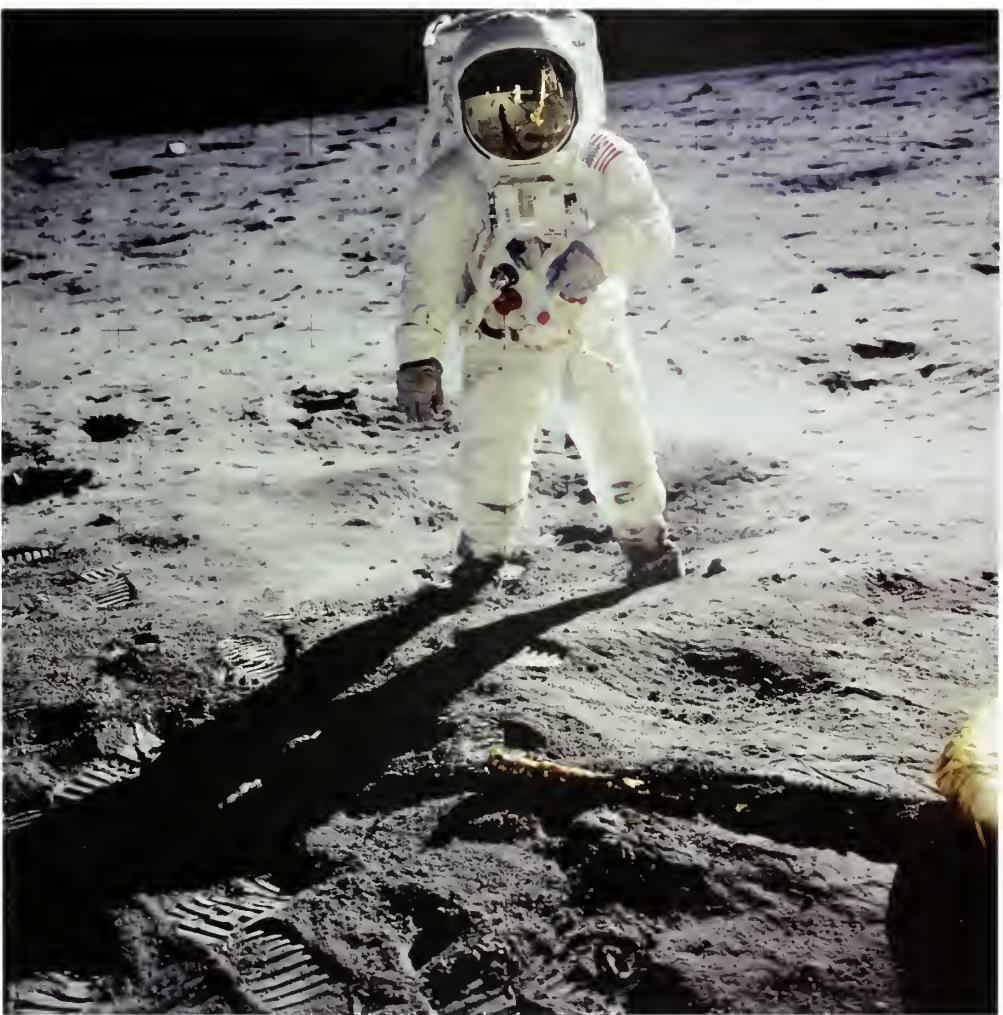
photographic art, and its influence on Dave's love of art, it is especially fitting that this collection has found a home at the Worcester Art Museum. Another pioneer in honoring this genre, it was one of the first museums, if not the first, to recognize and exhibit photographs as works of fine art.

Over the past twenty years, Dave's support for the arts has helped communities such as Provincetown and the Rivers School enrich the lives of people, especially students. In 1997, he bought and renovated the Eastern School in Provincetown. It became a center for arts, the Schoolhouse Center, which included performance space, artists' studios, and two art galleries: the Driskel Gallery (dedicated to a friend of Dave's who had recently passed away), devoted exclusively to photography, and the Silas-Kenyon Gallery, which was devoted to local and regional artists. These galleries are still active today, as the Schoolhouse Gallery and artSTRAND, and a performance space named "The Davis Space"

Worcester that I had missed at the time, or simply forgotten. The one that is still in my mind's eye is Larry Burrows's photo of Jim Farley, *U.S. Marine After a Mission* (1965). This simple image captured the horror of war and its effect on the psyche of a soldier. Other iconic photojournalistic images of the entertainment arts, on the other hand, were like an emotional and psychic salve. The exhibit highlights the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan Show (Eddie Adams, 1964), Jimi Hendrix at the Monterey Pop Festival (Jim Marshall, 1967), and Janice Joplin at Woodstock (Rowland Scherman, 1969), among others. Celebrating the rebellious nature of the era in a positive way, the photos balance the raw horror we often experienced in these times.

Even as a young man, Dave possessed a very keen intellect, but even more so, he observed people, events, and himself constantly. Now I can't help thinking we were all snapshots he took mentally and reworked in the darkroom of his mind. I mentioned earlier that we both shared Wesleyan University as our undergraduate college. Back in 1959, when I was a freshman, Wesleyan was often called "Diversity University," and it still is today. Its students are highly intellectual and passionate about their interests. Wesleyan encourages its students to find the subject or cause that consumes them and to make it their life's work.

In the late 1950s, only Columbia University and Wesleyan looked at film production and history as disciplines for intense academic study. Concomitantly, photography was taught and its history studied at Wesleyan when art history as a discipline thought of photographs as mere craft. Dave studied photography, photojournalism, and film study with a passion as an undergraduate, and I am convinced that the events and images that had shaped his growing years now became a catalyst for using art in multiple ways to enrich people's lives. Given Wesleyan's contributions to



(TOP) PAUL SCHUTZER, ON THE PRESIDENTIAL DAIS AT THE INAUGURATION OF JOHN F. KENNEDY, 1961, GELATIN SILVER PRINT
 (ABOVE) BUZZ ALDRIN, NEIL ARMSTRONG ON THE MOON, 1969, CHROMOGENIC PRINT



THOUGHTS FROM THE COLLECTOR

WHEN I STARTED on this journey I had no idea how far I would travel. I had no idea of what I would learn about a troubled, yet exciting period of this country's past, and also about myself. I had no intention of collecting over 120 photographs, posters, and ephemera; I never considered a museum gift, and certainly not an exhibition. Nor did I imagine the effect that the collection would have on my life, and indeed how its power and scope would change my life in many ways. I certainly did not expect to revisit my own past through the lenses of so many great photographers.

In 2000, I owned the Schoolhouse Center for Art and Design in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Since my passion is photography, I had devoted nearly half of the gallery space to both vintage and modern photography in the Driskel Gallery. At the time it was something of a risk in the seasonal, tourist-based Cape Cod economy. "I could have taken that," was often whispered, as I expected, but it was not my goal to convert the disbelievers. Instead, I wanted to find the audience for photography I knew existed. Over time we did find it and the gallery had a very successful run.

It was there that this collection began quite by accident. Larry Collins, the gallery director for the Driskel Gallery, organized an exhibition with a war theme that included vintage prints of Eddie Adams's famous *Brigadier General Nguyen Ngoc Loan Executing the Suspected Viet Cong Guerilla Nguen Van Lem* (Fig. 7, Cat. 49), and Nick Ut's *Children Fleeing a Napalm Attack on their Village of Tràng Bàng* (Fig. 8, Cat. 81). I reacted so strongly to seeing these images again that I felt compelled to buy the prints. After all, the heart-wrenching and soul-searching images were part of my visual memory. Larry and I talked about the impact of such photographs not only on our lives, but those of so many others, and we debated their aesthetic merit. Thus, the seed of this collection had been planted that Friday evening on Commercial Street in Provincetown.

At first I envisioned a small, personal collection of the photographs that I remembered from the turbulent sixties. From time to time Larry and I talked about what they might be, and we put together a modest list. At first we were able to secure many of the photographs, but over time some of our choices proved challenging to locate. Large magazine and newspaper publishers had already digitized their file photographs, and had either discarded or given the originals away. Luckily, I was able to secure a few cornerstones for the collection early on, file prints that have extraordinary history and provenance. The records of numerous places and dates of publication are stamped and scribbled on their backs. Several had been reproduced so often that there was not enough space for even one more stamp. These prints represented the ideal, but became increasingly hard to find, and more and more expensive.

Over the twelve years it took to gather what I consider a meaningful and comprehensive portrait of those years, my viewpoint became more specific and my focus shifted. Rather than a personal collection I decided to share the photos in the form of a larger group. I wanted the potential viewer to glimpse the period of my teenage and college years, a difficult and confusing time of anyone's life. It was my coming of age, and my experience of adolescence took place amidst the mayhem of a rapidly changing society. Beginning with the optimistic election of John F. Kennedy as president, his subsequent assassination and ending with disturbing events like the Watergate Scandal and Kent State Massacre, we lived those years in a pressure cooker of tragedy and triumph, horror and honor, shock and shock value, cynicism and celebration. . . .

I present these photographs not to comment but rather to share my experience of the time. I am not a historian, but I was there. If you were there too you will recall the impact and power of these photographs. If you are too young to have lived through that time, I hope you can take away something that you have never felt before.

This collection is a story, the story of coming of age.

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honors Dave's contributions. He sold the building to WOMR, a not-for-profit radio station, in 2005 and has remained on local boards involving theater and art as a prominent, often silent, angel.

About fourteen years ago, David returned to the Rivers School determined to make a difference. One of his first acts was to establish the founding gift that established the Rivers Conservatory program. Each year, five students audition to become Conservatory scholars. Once chosen, they follow the normal academic day at the main campus and then in early afternoon wend their way to the Conservatory to devote an additional four hours to their instruments and the study of musical composition and theory. When these scholars graduate, they may choose to pursue a career at a conservatory, such as Juilliard or the New England Conservatory, or follow a non-musical path at a traditional university. This was followed a decade ago by a scholarship awarded to an eighth- or ninth-grade artist who would have his or her tuition paid for while continuing to grow within the various media. In addition, Dave has become a member of the Board of Trustees, as well as the Facilities Committee and Faculty Enrichment Committees. He is also heavily involved in plans for a new theater to be built on campus.

Dave and I have kept in contact over the decades, and during these visits, I've often caught a glimpse of that teenager who asked excellent questions and observed everything around him so keenly. Most often, though, I've seen a man who has taken charge of his life with a special passion, a mission to use art in all of its forms to help those around him. I don't think it was mere chance that Dave cited the following poem, Edwin Markham's "Outwitted," in his Rivers senior yearbook:

He drew a circle that shut me out,
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout,
But love and I had the wit to win,
We drew a circle that took him in.

This poem captures the essence of Dave and his generosity. Despite the personal struggles he experienced as a teen, within his own life and in making sense of the conflicts in the world around him, he was able to find a way through art to gain perspective and thrive. Through his collections and compassion, Dave has brought us all back into his circle. ☒

JACK JARZAVEK taught French, English, and art history for forty years at the Rivers School and then stayed on for five more to work in the Alumni Office. He and his partner of forty-nine years live half a year in Arezzo, Italy, and the other half in Jamaica Plain. Classical vocal music and Romanesque and Byzantine art are his greatest artistic passions.

Getting Loose

THE ART OF JILL EPSTEIN

By E. J. Kahn III

PULLING INTO THE modest collection of strip-mall-like structures that constitute what is grandly referred to as Truro Center, you may—if your timing is right—spot a small cloth flag saying “Studio” in front of a doorway in the parking lot’s farthest corner. Inside the storefront that’s been christened River Studio Art, you’ll find artist Jill Epstein, her paintings, her assemblages, her prints, her books, her paints, her brushes, her easels, the work of her gallery partner Miriam Freidin . . . and, more often than not, family, friends, and strangers who’ve wandered in after checking lobster prices at Mac’s Seafood next door. For the past eight years, on these lazy summer afternoons, the River Studio Art space—whose back entry opens onto a view of the Pamet River Valley and, in the distance, Cape Cod Bay—has felt as much seaside salon as workplace, with the banter drifting from light and color to kids, openings, and the politics and relationships that fuel small-town engagement.

That’s not by accident. Since 1985, when Jill and husband Richard first arrived in Truro, and she began her unbroken association with the Center for the Arts at Castle Hill, the artist has endeavored to create a sense of community as part of her core environment. This vision

she owes in part to the late Budd Hopkins, whose tales of nights in the Cedar Tavern in Greenwich Village—hangout for Pollock and de Kooning and Kline, home to Robert Motherwell’s salons—colored the weekly collage class she took with him. “I had always thought that’s something lacking in the artist community now,” she recalls, “those moments where people just sit and have wine and talk about their art. It’s not the same as going to an opening.” When the vacant shop on the banks of the Pamet became available, she grabbed it. Soon, a community of fellow artists and art-lovers found their way there too. It felt loose and inviting.

These days, River Studio Art is Epstein’s principal showplace, although she has consistently shown and worked each winter in Florida, where she has a second studio. Her work—in oils and, most recently, acrylics, encaustic (hot wax on canvas), and found objects—ranges across a broad spectrum, but the focus is inevitably the color and the light to which the River Art conversations return, again and again. Our Skype-enabled discussions began in midwinter, and found her in the country’s southernmost city, reflecting on her journey as an artist and excited by her work in a new medium.

E. J. Kahn: You look pretty relaxed on this late January afternoon.

Jill Epstein: I am in Key West. The sky is gorgeous, the palms are blowing.

Kahn: I gather you’ve switched to acrylics, something you once said you’d never do. I understand that when you were in El Salvador you felt as if you had to work very fast.

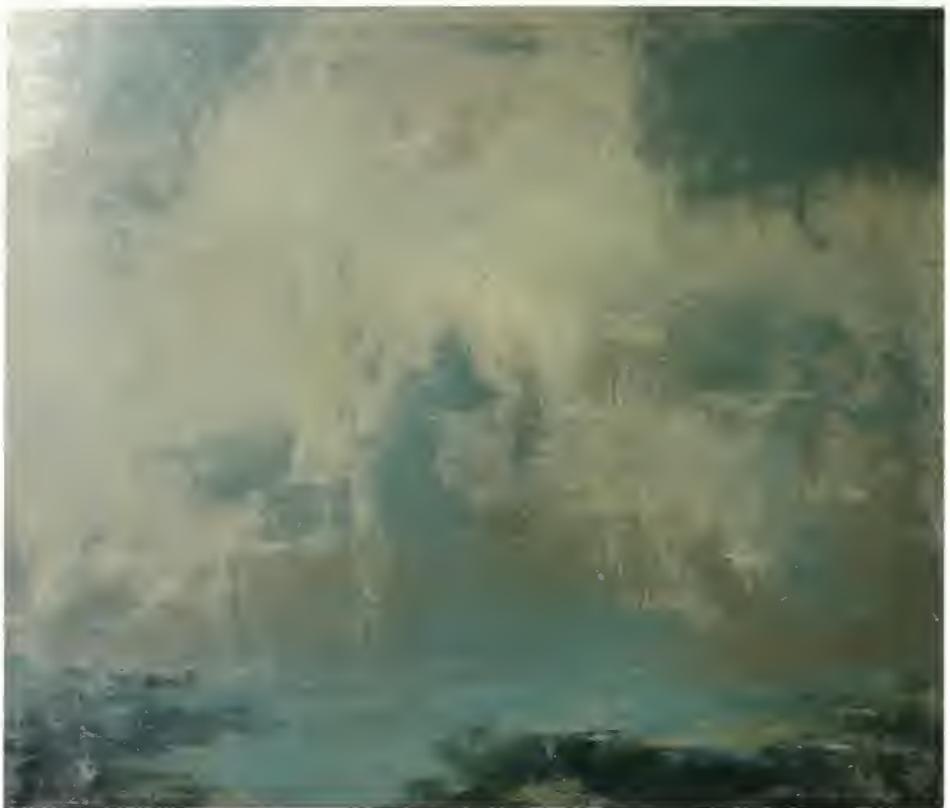
Epstein: Yes, I had this mind-set that I was married to oil paints, because I love the smell of them, I love the way they feel on my hands. I was forced to buy acrylics because I knew I couldn’t wait for oils to dry before the next session. I was pleasantly surprised that working fast was nice because I am a loose painter and I like to layer. It was nice to leave Central America having painted ten paintings in a period of something like eight days. I couldn’t have done that if I were using oil paints.

Kahn: What do you mean by “a loose painter”?

Epstein: It’s a concept that Cynthia Packard brought to me. Cynthia got me into movement, line, color, everything that you feel in the painting. She makes you appreciate the paint, the model, everything that’s there. It’s hard to find your voice while practicing a teacher’s techniques. Each



SAN SALVADOR, 2012, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 20 BY 20 INCHES



INTO BLUE, 2012, OIL ON LINEN, 20 BY 20 INCHES

teacher is different and you take things from each teacher and synthesize it in your mind. That's the hardest thing for an artist. To find your own voice and color palette.

Kahn: Have you found your color? How would you describe that process?

Epstein: Color and action are my motivators. I love mixing colors and find it challenging to try to get the colors as close as I can to something I see. Because I mainly do landscapes and seascapes, the color of the sea is key. For example, the light in Provincetown is similar to the light here in the Keys, but the colors of the water differ greatly. The water in the Northeast is reflected above sand rather than coral. The water in Key West is the most beautiful pale turquoise.

SALVATORE FIUMARA



GALLERY EHVA • SHANK PAINTER ROAD

Kahn: Were you focused on the water in El Salvador?

Epstein: No, I actually started painting buildings that appeared broken down, with old cracked stucco. I've been drawn to aging buildings and their colors since I began to paint. When I see an old building, or an old fence, or copper that's aged—even looking down at a crack in the sidewalk—I can see a painting. And that's what happened when I was there, collecting those images, and painting on the nineteenth floor of a condo overlooking the volcanoes, with music rising from the street below. It was really, really inspiring.

Kahn: You seem to use environment and its light as a principal source of inspiration.

Epstein: I am inspired by that, but I am also inspired by things that have happened to me in the past. Many years ago now, when I was ill and lost my sight in one eye, I found myself doing paintings of women. I guess I was withdrawn into myself, and became a little unsure of myself, unsure of what I could do. But what I found was that I was only limited to a change in my depth perception, which was easy to remedy. I could compensate and not be confined or limited in my subjects. I felt anxious about the change, but it was actually an easy transition and it made me want to paint more. The painting, the music—Prince, for the most part, and I can't tell you why—that I'd listen to, and the support I got from those closest to me, pulled me through. When, during my recovery, I asked my husband, Richard, if he thought my painting had changed, he said, "No." Then he corrected himself and told me it had gotten better. And I never looked back.

Kahn: Let's go back to the beginning. You grew up in Indiana, with no plan to be an artist, but with an idea you were going to leave the Midwest.

Epstein: I was happy growing up there, happy going to my grandparents' farm outside South Bend on weekends, happy being a teenager, happy becoming a hippie. But at fifteen I went to Miami for a visit with my cousins and saw the ocean. It was just like something hit me. I was in awe. I felt landlocked and I knew I had to be near the water.

Kahn: So when you were in Miami and you fell in love with the sea and the light, you still didn't have any thought about becoming an artist?

Epstein: When I started to go to school there, my goal was to study art—but as soon as I got into that classroom, I would look outside and see the sky and I would feel like a caged animal. I couldn't stay there. It wasn't until I arrived in Boston, met my husband-to-be, Richard, and opened Pepperweed, our store, that I began to work with fabrics and color. I designed clothing, was part of a fashion show at Harvard University, and began taking oil painting courses in Cambridge. At the time, it was just a hobby. But, while raising two daughters, I attended Mass. College of Art, studying figure drawing and portraiture. When we moved to Truro in 1985, into an antique house across the street from Castle Hill, I started painting, and entering and working in shows and auctions. I was very shy about it. At the summer auction, I would have to go inside of Castle Hill because I didn't want to see what was happening with my work. But the paintings sold, and a couple of times I was the highest-selling artist. And that's when I started my relationship with Castle Hill, becoming a board member, running the lecture series, managing the open house.

Kahn: Online is a description you wrote of Ethel Edwards, the late visual artist from Wellfleet and New York City who was one of your teachers at Castle Hill. When did she become an influence?

Epstein: When I joined the board, I ended up taking quite a few classes, starting out with Ethel. She was an amazing teacher and an amazing person, a kind of teacher that I needed because she was such a free spirit and so encouraging. She really became a mentor to me and a good friend. Ethel was the type of person who would teach that "you put down that mark and that's your mark." In other words, don't focus on your influences, because you own your work. I've never felt comfortable with the idea of creating "a body of work." I just love painting, doing what I want. When you come into my studio, you will see that the color palette is pretty consistent. But if I want to paint a figure one day, or a still life, or a landscape, or a seascape, or switch to oil or house paint, I want to feel free to do it. I don't want to be tied down to or identified with one series of paintings that look the same. It's just not me.

Kahn: Another important teacher seems to have been Joyce Johnson, the sculptor.

Epstein: True. At the time I was doing figure drawing and painting, I took her sculpture figure



UNTITLED, 2012, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 20 BY 20 INCHES

class—sculpture and clay—and that brought me the experience of three-dimensional art and seeing the mass of the body. I learned to see the depth of a model—the flesh, the blood, the internal action of the figure through the way they are holding something and what they are thinking. Now when I do a figure, I often will have the person holding a cigarette, lying down, meditating or reading, with a clock in the frame, as if in a play. There's an implied movement—again, I think of it as action—and it's why I love to paint sky and water too. They're always moving.

Kahn: You've mentioned in interviews or on your blog that your historical influences include Hans Hofmann, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, and Edwin Dickinson. How have they shaped your work?

Epstein: As visual influences, I think it's hard to do a good abstract painting. The simplicity of someone like Franz Kline, when you see his brushstrokes and lack of color, it makes a huge impact. Motherwell is the same way. An abstract painting is like a puzzle. You are trying to figure out what goes where, how big a space, the tone of the color palette.

Kahn: How do you work? Do you have any kind of schedule or a disciplined process?

Epstein: I wish! I paint indoors, in my studio, and from memory and my imagination. I rarely work outdoors because I find the challenge of the elements too distracting. I once lug all my materials to the Boston Public Garden, only to find—after I was set up and ready to paint—that I had left all my brushes behind. What to do? I picked up some small twigs and painted. The tourists who observed me seemed fascinated. Me, not so much. I will paint in the afternoon if the light is right. Once I get into my studio and get everything set up, I love it. When I started to paint with Cynthia Packard, others would be drawing perfect little flowers and I would be throwing the paint on, thinking, "Oh God, what am I doing?" Cynthia would come over and say, "Oh, you don't have any problem, just stay where you are, just be loose."

Kahn: What's your sense of the art community on the Outer Cape today?

Epstein: There are so many artists that you feel you could drown in it. I just do what I want to do and don't try to compete with anybody. That's why I have never really tried to get into any kind of an art scene. I have my family and my gardening. It wasn't a priority to fit in.

Kahn: Some of your most unusual work is the painting that you've done using wax.

Epstein: I like wax, but wax can be very toxic. My lungs aren't great, so when I work in wax, I mostly work in cold wax. I don't work in beeswax. Cynthia Packard uses tar, cold wax, all kinds of materials, and she draws on the canvas with it, hot and melted.

Kahn: So are you happy with where you are right now as an artist, or do you feel as if there is a distance still to travel?

Epstein: I don't think that way. It's just a process, and my process begins with memory. When I paint a seascape or a landscape or the dunes, it will inevitably look like some place I have been, but it's the impression of the place where I have been. I will visualize, for example, the dunes by the Cranberry Bog Trail, and I just start painting from there. But one result has been that I've got my eighty-four-year-old father painting. He's set up a studio in his garage. He loves it! ▶

E.J. KAHN III—better known as Terry in the Pamet River Valley—has served as an editor of the late Provincetown Advocate and Boston Magazine, and as a consultant in Washington and New York City, where he lives with his wife, Lesley Silvester.

Anna Poor

VULNERABILITY AND POWER

By Christopher Busa

ANNA POOR WAS born into an ethos in which it was assumed that she would make do with what was available for the purpose of making a valued object that never existed before. From the example of a distant relative, Henry Varnum Poor (1812–1905), a founder of Standard & Poor's authoritative stock index, Anna came to understand the conceptual power of money as similar to cultural property created by artists. Emboldened by the much-closer example of her grandfather, an artist who also happened to be named Henry Varnum Poor (1887–1970), Anna began to chuckle at the irony of the impoverished artist creating work for professional art historians and secondary markets.

She accepted her family branch's designation as the "poor Poors." Henry Varnum Poor nonetheless was a notable figure in the twentieth-century Arts and Crafts movement—a celebrated ceramicist, a self-taught architect of hand-built homes, a painter who was close friends with Raphael Soyer and Edward Hopper, and, along with the sculptor Sidney Simon, a founder of the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. Poor wrote in his journals of how pained and proud he was to lead an exemplary creative life, despite his relative poverty.

Influenced by the stone farmhouses he saw in France during service in World War II, Poor constructed his own house, Crow House,

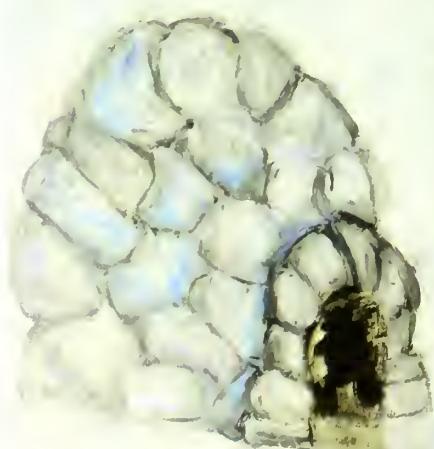


ASSYRIAN SHIN GUARD, 2009, 24-KARAT GOLD LEAF ON WAX, 8.5 BY 3.5 BY 2.5 INCHES

using stones collected from the fields in Rockland County, forty-five miles north of New York City. At the time, Carson McCullers described it as the "most beautiful house in America," and today the Friends of Crow House are seeking to restore it as a museum.

Anna spent many childhood hours inside, surprised to find "doors everywhere leading outside." While building the house, her grandfather had devised ways to slide stones down the mountains on sleds in order to use them in construction. Before the property had electricity, he fashioned a wood-fired kiln and used the stream to make a waterwheel to grind glazes by putting rocks in jars with pigments. There was a political dimension in his passion that continued in the documentary films of Peter Poor, Anna's father. Growing up, she was very aware of the coming together of politics and art.

She absorbed the idea that one could make anything with one's own hands: "My grandfather carved door latches out of wood. Was there



WHERE'S MY IGLOO?, 2012, MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER, 9 BY 6 INCHES



JUNO'S BEST INTESTINES, 2012, MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER, 14 BY 11 INCHES

anything in that house that he didn't actually make? He made the furniture. He made the plates we ate from. So the can-do idea of being able to do something yourself was very much the idea I was brought up on." This legacy continues in the workshops Poor teaches at the Truro Center for the Arts at Castle Hill, founded by Joyce Johnson, an artist who embodies this Emersonian tradition of self-reliance and who also built her own unique house in Truro.

When the Iraq Museum was looted in 2001 after the American invasion, Poor fabricated a series of sculptures referencing stolen artifacts, as if she were trying "to make the sculptures that were stolen." Even before the looting, examples of Assyrian armor were extremely scarce. Ironically, it is the very loss of the original that gives value to the re-created relics. Just as humans cannot dream of a negative experience—such as the death of a loved one—with picturing what is absent as tangibly present, art is a technique for substituting something yearned for with something actual.

Poor's *Assyrian Shin Guard*, a fragment in wax with gold embellishments—a bird of prey with its talons in the swirls of open water—evokes how life-and-death conflict can depend on a single weakness: an Achilles' heel. The Assyrians supplied their warriors with high leather boots, handsomely tooled with bulls and lions and with iron plates sewn into the leather, allowing fearsome flexibility. King Sennacherib's siege of dozens of towns in Judea—an act of particular ferocity, coupled with unrelenting arrogance—is rendered in the Bible. Lord Byron's poem on the destruction begins: "The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold, / And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold." Poor's sheath, which fits her leg as if made for her, also serves as solace for the memory of burning her leg during a foundry fire.

Six months before the attack on the World Trade Center in New York, the Taliban destroyed the ancient pair of Buddhas in Afghanistan, outraging the art world while the world at large remained ignorant of the carvings in a sandstone cliff, honeycombed with tunnels and dwellings where the faithful could live close to their spiritual source. Poor was sickened at the desecration of these statues, towering 188 feet tall and standing for seventeen centuries: "Art must have so much power that the Taliban knew the way to break down a community is to attack its art—the surest way to debilitate people is by depriving them of their symbols."

Symbols drive Anna Poor's art; they are her quick-turning vehicle for averting disaster. She speaks disarmingly about her psychological motivation to create art. Thinking of Poor's early experiences in the innards of her grandfather's house, I wondered about her drawing of an Eskimo igloo, delineating rounded blocks of ice with a bluish tint around the seams, emphasizing the matrix of joining. The tightly sealed enclosure, domed like a beehive, offers a safe house in a field of snow. She has another drawing showing the X-ray of a stomach in which the ascending colon, the transverse colon, and the descending colon act to frame the packed coils of the small intestine. Scratched with line delineations casing the coils, they look like links of sausages wrapped in radiant warm red, and are tinted, like the igloo, with a cooling blue, dynamically balancing the comfort zone somewhere between fire and ice.



(TOP) FINGER PROTECTOR, 2012, WHITE BRONZE, 4 BY 2 BY 1.5 INCHES
 (ABOVE) GIACOMETTI'S LEGS, 2007, GILDED BRONZE, PINK ALABASTER, 7.5 BY 7.5 BY 7.5 INCHES

Poor has found a way of converting vulnerability into strength and power, seeking out challenges in which she is obliged to rise to the occasion. When she first met the photographer Francis Olschafskie, not knowing she would marry him, she instinctively tested his mettle by socking him solidly in the stomach. Some of the words the artist summons to explain the power of her work are rendered in a glossary she affixed to an exhibition wall, including "amulet" and "talisman," suggesting a fetishistic function in the magic of art to ward off evil.

Another of her pieces is called *Finger Protector*. During a gallery visit together, I remarked to Poor that the creature was missing an appendage. A hollow core was shaped to fit a finger, like the thimble of a seamstress. "Yes," she said, "he has such a sweet little worried face. Until you mentioned it, I didn't even realize he has only one arm. Poor baby!"

"Poor baby?" I pointed out the creature's sharp teeth and lethal left arm.

"Yes," she said, "he's here to protect me. And this makes me want to talk about how some people find my pieces funny or cute, because they're small and diminutive. Often the animals, for me, take the place of human beings. What I am trying to talk about is so horrendous and painful, I put them in animal form. So these tiny little bronze birds are called *Innocent Bystanders and Orphans* because of all the bombs that have killed innocent people."

An installation by Anna Poor is environmental, working on the viewer from three dimensions,



ANNA POOR IN HER STUDIO, 2013 PHOTO BY FRANCIS OLSHAFSKIE

since she uses the wall as well as the open space of the room with the standing presences of her reliquary pieces, under glass boxes, in the manner of museum exhibitions of rare historical findings. The objects become precious in simply being the subject of loving attention. When she was

sixteen, Poor developed an infatuation with the artist Alberto Giacometti, entranced by his strong, gaunt, bony face that was itself a kind of carved sculpture. Giacometti famously suffered extreme anxiety as he worked for hours in the presence of a model, watching the substantial figure he knew so well becoming unknown, shrinking into a haunting skein of existential apparitions.

Only after she finished *Giacometti's Legs* did Poor understand that she had unconsciously been referencing Giacometti, whose own *Woman with Her Throat Cut* was first splayed, provocatively, on the gallery floor in 1932. Looking like a mangled scorpion, the piece was in two parts, much like Poor's. Power and pathos are linked only after there is pathos, where power comes into being on the occasion of its valuation of loss.

If Poor modeled her gilded legs on Giacometti's stubby articulations, obsessively adjusted in every pinch, her aim was to elevate and carry, ceremonially, the pink alabaster naked torso of a woman, missing her head and legs. Poor, however, has placed the strutting figure not standing, but lying down in its glass box, in a position of post-action repose, evoking the most curious feeling that what happened was not long ago but yesterday.

Poor told me that she felt her piece, carved by a woman, made for "a less violent version" of how the female form might cause male anxiety. Indeed, this piece is a most moving requiem for universal female suffering, making the viewer wonder if where he or she stands in the viewing alters what is seen. Giacometti said he found it difficult to see the whole of a sculpture at once: "When I see the profile, I forget the front." Poor might have said as well, "When I see the loss, I forget I'm vulnerable." □

CHRISTOPHER BUSA is editor of Provincetown Arts.

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Miriam Laufer

TWENTIETH-CENTURY VOYAGE

By Susan Bee

THE LIFE STORY of my mother, Miriam Laufer, has many elements shared by Jews of her generation caught between the violent dissolution of an Old World lifestyle and the adoption of a new diasporic one. Personal changes were mirrored in political changes, and vice versa, and her journey from childhood to adulthood traced a voyage through nations also in transition, crossing borders and territories whose identities were also shifting. Born in Poland in 1918, Miriam Ickowitz (later Laufer) grew up in Berlin. Her grandfather was a Torah scribe. Her father deserted the family in the 1920s and became an actor in Yiddish theater in Uruguay, leaving her mother abandoned and jobless. Miriam and her brother, Leo, were put in the care of the Ahava, a progressive Jewish children's home in Berlin. At Ahava (the name means "love"), art became an important part of Miriam's life, and she designed stage sets for theater productions and worked in the art studio. With the rise of Fascism in Germany, the entire orphanage relocated to Palestine in 1934, thus saving the children from Nazi extermination.

In 1938, Miriam entered Bezalel Art School in Jerusalem on a scholarship, beginning her formal art education. She studied graphics with Joseph Budko, the head of the school, and painting with Mordecai Ardon, who had been a student at the Bauhaus. Miriam worked as a painter for the occupying British Army, honing her drafting skills while lettering signs in English, Hebrew, Arabic, French, Polish, Greek, and Urdu.

While in Palestine, Miriam met Sigmund Laufer (1920–2007), a fellow artist and designer, dedicated kibbutznik, and activist in the Labor Party, and they married in 1941. The two left for New York in 1947, settling in



MIRIAM LAUFER IN FRONT OF ONE OF HER PAINTINGS, 1962



(LEFT) *SELF-PORTRAIT*, 1968, OIL AND COLLAGE ON TWO PANELS, 30 BY 60 INCHES
COLLECTION OF ROBERT SPEISER

(BELOW) *FIGURES IN SPACE*, 1963, OIL ON CANVAS, 50 BY 40 INCHES
COLLECTION OF ROBERT SPEISER

(OPPOSITE PAGE) *MY DAUGHTERS*, 1965, OIL ON CANVAS, 50 BY 30 INCHES

the German enclave of Yorkville on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, where they had two daughters: my younger sister, Abigail Laufer, and me. Miriam worked as a calligrapher, illustrator, and graphic designer. She illustrated children's books and technical manuals, designed cocktail napkins and greeting cards, and made elaborate diplomas and fancy certificates for awards.

During the early 1960s, she taught painting and drawing at New York University, and, in the late 1960s, she became involved with the women's movement and was an early supporter of feminist art and its core concerns. During this period, she continued to paint and developed a unique and striking style. Critics of an earlier era wrote that she "follows her intuitions rather than reason" (*ArtVoices*, December 1963). Rackstraw Downes put it this way: "In her voluptuously painted and highly colored compositions with figures and sections of figures, she contrasts various plastic elements while juggling with symbolic motifs, sometimes sinister, and sometimes lascivious" (*ARTnews*, February 1968). John Canaday was clearly overwhelmed: "Well there is sex and there's sex. In these paintings, running riot, it makes you wish that it could be a little less tumultuous. . . . Some superior ink drawings . . . are like time off between orgies" (*New York Times*, 1966). At age fifty-two, she returned to school at Brooklyn College and received a BA, magna cum laude, in 1973.

My parents were lifelong summer residents of Provincetown, and their circle of dynamic, mostly Jewish, artists, writers, and musicians became a part of my childhood. I grew up knowing Victor Lipton and Helen Duberstein, Resia and Ilya Schor, Chaim and Renee Gross, Arthur Cohen and Elizabeth Rogers. In addition, my parents' close friends Laura and Marvin Speiser used to visit us here. Their son, Robert Speiser, and his partner, musician Anthony Brackett, now live in Provincetown year-round with their children and are major collectors of my parents' art.

I went regularly to their exhibits at the Provincetown Art Association, Bellardo Gallery, Paul Kessler Gallery, and other venues. Many of my childhood memories are of openings and parties, or of sitting in a corner of the studio or print workshop at the Pratt Graphics Center in Manhattan, while my parents worked at their art.

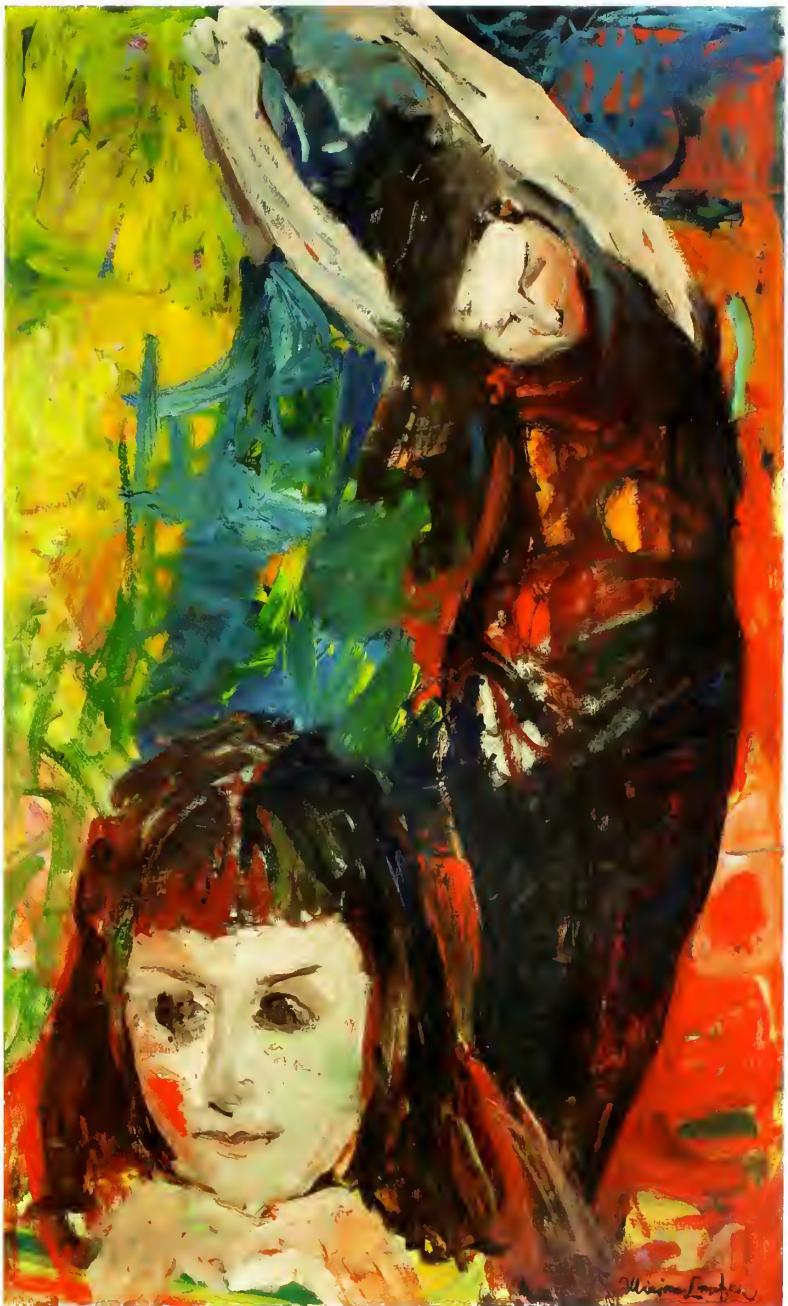
My parents appreciated the bohemian atmosphere of Provincetown (and the reasonable rental rates!). In our early visits, in the 1950s, we stayed in the back of town near the neighborhood occupied by Portuguese fishermen and their families. I played in the summer on the streets and beaches with the local kids. My mother would go to the wharf to buy fish from the boats as they came in. Both of my parents painted and drew in the summer months, my mother's watercolors, monotypes, and oil paintings displaying the lush color that would typify her later work. She painted the *Self-Portrait* that accompanies this article in a house in Provincetown that



Miriam Laufer's paintings are notable for their intensity of feeling, the vibrancy of the brushwork and color, and the fluid handling of the paint. Attraction to strong colors—red, purple, blue, green, yellow, orange—and an avoidance of muddy and subdued tones is characteristic; a color sense reflecting her own abundantly energetic, outgoing nature. Equally predominant are the recurrent female figures—sensuous, revealing nudes and self-portraits in oil as well as the many ink and wash drawings that she did from models. Overall, her work involves the integration of an expressive concern for figuration with an underlying commitment to pure form and color. . . .

Her style also integrates other influences: Matisse, the Fauves, geometric abstraction, as well as the American abstract art movements of which she was a part. Like many of the artists who came to New York City in the 1940s and participated in the famous Tenth Street days, she brought with her an adventurous artistic spirit and a strong cultural heritage. Laufer saw many of the works of the German Expressionists first hand during her formative years in Berlin. . . . Laufer's work underscores again the German Expressionist roots of Abstract Expressionism. Her subject matter, too, is often in the Expressionist vein. While she could paint light-hearted "joie de vivre" pieces, more frequently the imagery, as well as the brushwork and color, express tension and anxiety.

— from a catalogue essay by Diana Morris Manister for *Miriam Laufer: A Retrospective* (1981)



we rented from Edward Giobbi in the summer of 1968. My father created drawings, watercolors, and etchings, many in black and white; later his prints became colorful and were influenced by Pop American culture.

As my parents became more settled in America and more successful, they were able to afford to rent a place on the water, closer to the bay side of Provincetown, but the colorful figures and lifestyle did not mask deeper realities. For instance, I remember visiting Arthur Cohen when he was painting in the dunes in a shack. Always poor and hungry, he was a frequent dinner guest, along with many other younger artists. My mother was an excellent cook and host, and our home was an endless coffee klatsch. Radical politics and art were discussed in various languages at all hours. Socialist issues, race questions, the role of unions, and European, American, and Israeli politics were all important to my parents and their friends at the time. They were associated with magazines such as *Commentary* and *Dissent*; there were also discussions about aesthetics and art topics with the writers, academics, artists, and psychiatrists who inhabited their milieu.

I still spend my summers in Provincetown, now with my husband, poet Charles Bernstein, and see the children of my parents' friends—Irene and Jackie Lipton, Mira Schor, and Mimi Gross—as well as other friends such

as Eileen Myles, Leopoldine Core, Richard Baker, Elizabeth Fodaski, and the late filmmaker George Kuchar, all carrying on a legacy of intellectual and artistic life nurtured by the community and connections made in those summer months. My connection with Mira Schor has been particularly strong and generative. I first met Mira as a child in Provincetown; we met again as young adults on the beach in Provincetown in the late 1970s and found we had a great rapport. We then started working together in 1986 on a publication, *M/E/A/N/I/N/G: A Journal of Contemporary Art Issues*, which continues today as *M/E/A/N/I/N/G Online*. *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* has been a collaboration between two artists, both painters with expanded interests in writing and politics, and an extended community of artists, art critics, historians, theorists, and poets, whom we sought to engage in discourse and to give a voice to. Over the years we have created a community of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* with over 150 individual contributors.

My mother was also very involved with other artists in the 10th Street cooperative gallery scene. She had seven solo shows of her paintings, prints, and drawings; most were at the Phoenix Gallery in New York, beginning with group shows in 1951. Two posthumous exhibits provided the occasion for critical review and assessment of her unique body of work: a retrospective



SUSAN BEE, AHAVA, BERLIN, 2012, OIL, ENAMEL, AND SAND ON CANVAS, 24 BY 36 INCHES

held at the Phoenix Gallery in NYC in 1981, with a catalogue essay by Diana Morris Manister, and *Seeing Double: Paintings by Susan Bee and Miriam Laufer* in 2006 at A.I.R. Gallery in NYC, with an essay by Johanna Drucker.

Drucker wrote:

Laufer's mature work was forged in another crucible: the pop-influenced and vividly aggressive first wave of feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Autobiographical subject matter and a ruthless spirit of confrontation charge her canvases in that period. . . . Suddenly the world seemed to come into the studio, bringing with it a whole new set of possibilities and questions. . . . The women in Laufer's canvases of the late 1960s and 1970s have . . . an aggressive, confrontational self-assertion that is marked. All the skills that the painter has acquired come into vivid play. A gesture of "take this" lets loose with mature spirit and energy. . . . Unlike others of her generation, Grace Hartigan or Joan Brown, she hasn't been "recovered" for this age. She never achieved the level of visibility or recognition of these figures. . . . But . . . at this distance . . . the strongest of the works, those portraits and self-portraits, show how intensely engaged she

was in trying to make images about the way women come to terms with artistic identity.

Miriam gave me a vital example of how you can make art the center of your life, while continuing to function as a wife, mother, feminist, and wage earner. I profited immensely from experiencing her artistic processes, as well as seeing her many struggles, firsthand. I was raised in a household where art was the main mode of expression. I was given paper, crayons, pencils, and paints and was encouraged to draw as much as possible. Also, I was often taken to museums and galleries as a child and continued this mode of living when I had my own children. Art was a way of life for my mother—not a choice, but rather a *gesamtwerk*, a whole way of interacting with and comprehending the world.

I feel I am following in Miriam's footsteps, even though she died suddenly from a stroke in 1980 at age sixty. The influence of her personality and legacy of her work have been carried on through her family as well as in the critical reception of her art. Writing about Miriam in *The Forward*, Joshua Cohen said:

Blood might be thicker than water, as the adage goes, but paint is thicker than both. Immigrant

artist Miriam Laufer, who died in 1980, was the mother of Manhattan Upper West Sider Susan Bee, and matriarch to one of the most experimental and intense artistic dynasties of Jewish New York. Besides the mother and daughter, the father, Sigmund Laufer, is a graphic artist. Bee married her high school sweetheart, great poet of postmodernism Charles Bernstein, with whom she had a daughter, Emma [Bee Bernstein], a young photographer [1985–2008]. Culture is the family business.

Our son Felix Bernstein, born in 1992, continues on with the family tradition as a filmmaker and performer in Kuchar's films and his own works.

Last fall, I was in Berlin for the first time since I went with my parents in the 1970s. I visited the site of the Ahava Kinderheim. Situated in the former East Berlin, in the Mitte, Berlin's old Jewish quarter, the Ahava building is war-scarred, dilapidated, and heavily graffitied, but still standing. I made a painting, *Ahava, Berlin* (2012), based on that visit, about which Raphael Rubinstein observed:

Unexpectedly, Bee transforms a snapshot situation (tourist daughter standing in front of orphanage where mother lived as child) into a powerful image of hope and renewal, albeit one that acknowledges the heavy price of history. The ultimate message of this painting is legible on the sign placed just above Bee's head: "Ahava," the Hebrew word for love.

In this painting, I address my complex feelings about my mother's artistic journey and her difficult life story and show how her journey, and my own, have come full circle. ▲

SUSAN BEE is a painter, editor, and book artist who lives in New York City. She had a solo show in May–June 2013 at Accola Griefen Gallery in New York and has had six solo shows at A.I.R. Gallery. She is the coeditor with Mira Schor of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G Online*. Bee has had fellowships at the MacDowell Colony, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and Yaddo. She teaches at the University of Pennsylvania and the School of Visual Arts. This September, she will be curating a small show of her mother's work at Gallery Ehva in Provincetown. Her website is: <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/bee>.

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CATHERINE MOSLEY'S MIXED-MEDIA PAINTINGS

By Christine de Lignières

AS CATHERINE MOSLEY revisiting the shores of Provincetown, the seascape of past summer days, when she created the 2013 *Poolside Series* of her recent solo exhibition at the A.I.R. Gallery in New York?

For her second exhibition at the gallery, Mosley presented mixed-media works, abstract and representational, both formal types contrasting sharply in tonality. Alone on the back wall opposite the entrance, a large, dark-hued grid compressing a subjacent orange glow stood out among works with images in pastel colors. While the densely packed abstraction of *Dot/Dash Series I-IX* (2013) was a new instance of the series that constituted her previous show, a closer look at the other works could find it there too as the partly obliterated substratum of images. Giving clues to the visual components of the work, the apposition of these seemingly exclusive approaches enriched the sensual experience of the exhibition. Although muted, the primary hues of the representational works ascertained images collaged on open fields that they further activated in periodic scatters. Anchored by the compact grid, the room vibrated with an uplifting if delicately diffused exuberance.

Emphasizing the flatness of the work, contoured images on an almost textureless ground subtly differentiate its nature from traditional painting on canvas. Here, the support of the cutout elements is a hand-printed sheet of Arches paper mounted on wood panels—often the very material of the collages too when it is not Mylar, as in the artist's latest works. In fact, hand-printed paper is the very matter of all of Mosley's mixed-media paintings.

The *Poolside Series* contributed the theme of leisure to the ambient levity of the exhibition.



POOLSIDE SERIES I, 2012, WOODCUT ON PAPER WITH PAINT, MOUNTED ON PANEL, 29 BY 22 INCHES

The generic outline of a female swimmer, limbs angled in various configurations of the diving motion, appears alone or in a group in each of the three works of the series, its repeated likeness enticing the eye to a continuous scanning that

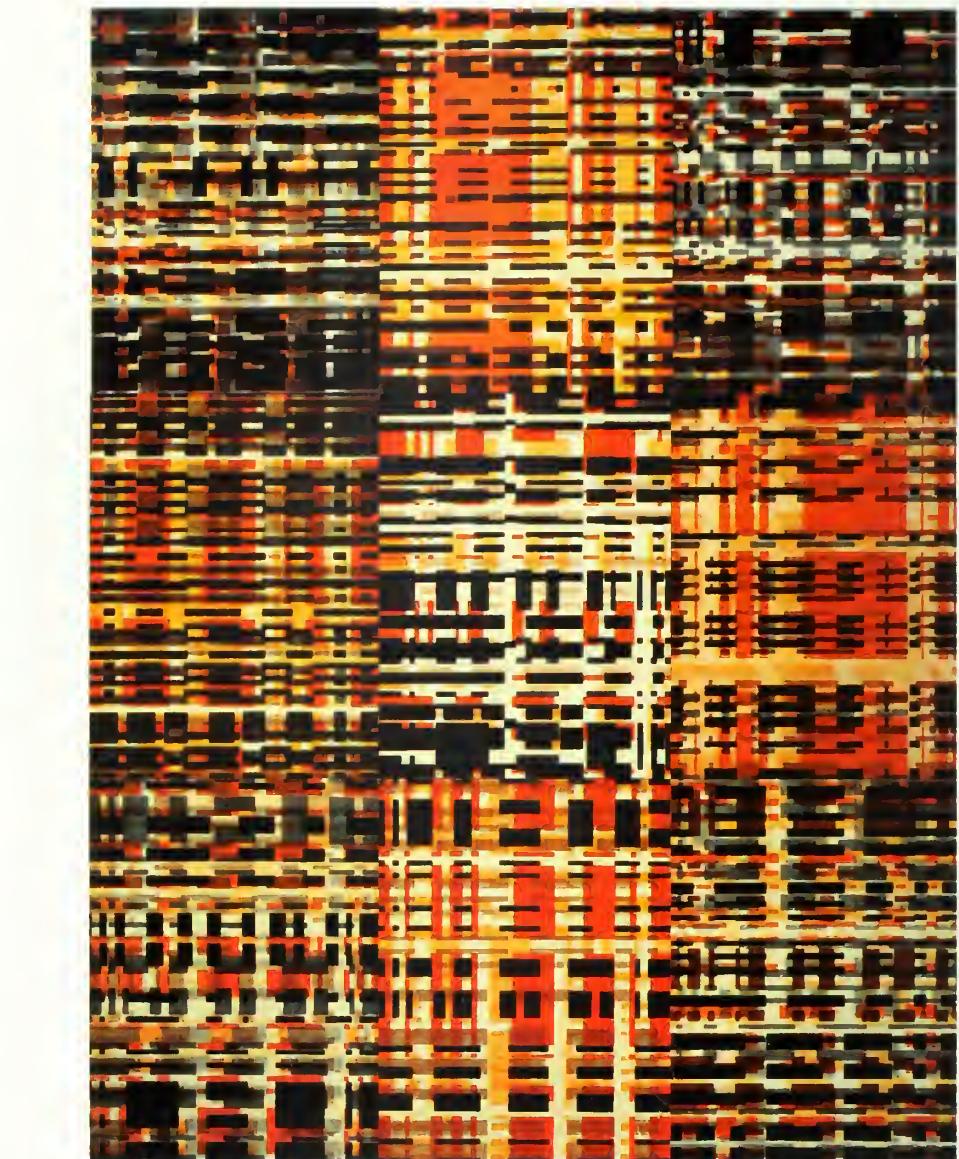
carries along the collaged silhouette as if it were jumping from one plane to the other over the spatial restriction of the frame. In *Poolside Series I* (2012) a body flexed into an isosceles triangle, whose apex is the round bottom clad in an orange

occupies the center of the surface while ad, delineated by a light-blue bathing cap, midway on a parallel virtual diagonal that includes the magenta head of a figure cropped at the shoulders in the above right corner and the olive-green buttock of another bather below. The oblique ellipsis of the three monochrome spheres becomes in turn the base of another triangle whose peak is again the rounded part of the orange swimsuit as the abstracted representation recedes beyond the dynamic geometric structure of the composition.

This chromatic interplay of circular shapes straddles the continuous pattern of an asymmetrical lattice. While the rectilinear, nearly subliminal, printed matrix of the background recurs in all of the exhibited works, it emerges fully in rhythmical saturation as the tautological material of the single figure in *Poolside Series IV* (2013). The rounded lines of the central checkered-bodied bather are replicated in this work by a circle and two spheres, beach balls or juggling props, also shaped out of a multicolored grid.

This oscillation between figuration and geometry is enabled by the simplified outline of an imagery drawn out of a Pop Art sensitivity that seeks unmitigated perception with a paradigmatic sampling of objects or figures. In past works, for instance, the artist has used tattoo catalogues as iconographic source for her collages, or "hand-made readymades"—Roy Lichtenstein's coinage for his pictorial quotations. The water splash in *Poolside Series III* (2013) is depicted with comic-strip stylization and emphasis, its magnified Mylar drops spewing glossily out of a squiggled puddle. The figures of the bathers are similarly generalized, in agreement with a genre probative of the "impersonality" that Claes Oldenburg defines as "a style [that] characterizes Pop art . . . in a pure sense."¹ Yet Mosley's work is a highly personal adaptation of Pop Art, appropriating an art of appropriation with a seductive playfulness negotiated through formal concerns usually dismissed by Pop Art as-isness. And the soft, small-nosed profile of her bathers is drawn with a tender gesture.

The streamlined design of popular culture that punctuates with whimsical humor the work throughout is also congenial to the use of scissors,



DOT/DASH SERIES I-IX, 2013, HAND-PRINTED STENCILS ON PAPER, MOUNTED ON NINE PANELS, 87 BY 66 INCHES

among the artist's requisite tools (and for which she relies on the supply of the Fashion Institute of Technology's store) since each printed shape is destined to be collaged to the final works.

The construction of the mixed-media paintings, these formalist/imagist hybrids, evolves out of a method that entails two distinct phases, each determining a specific relation to the picture plane. Mosley first assembles a stock of visual materials, grounds or collages, by printing graphics on a broad range of papers, or other laminates such as Mylar, on her press. In this mode of production, the artist is engaged in a physical activity compelled by the horizontal plane of the flatbed, whose originary function implies textual linearity and which, like reading, demands proximity to the means of transmission.

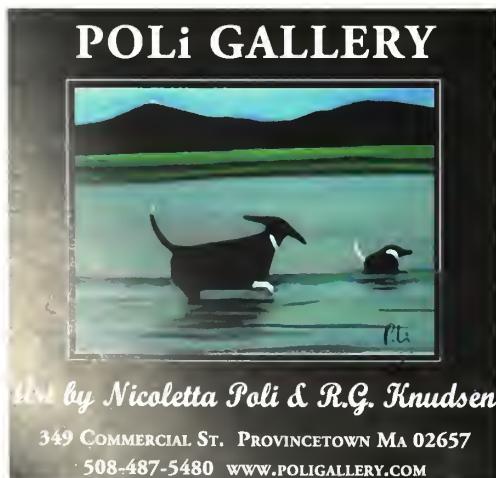
A renowned practitioner in the rarefied realm of limited-edition prints, Catherine Mosley collaborated with Robert Motherwell from 1972 to 1991. Together, they produced over one hundred editions of his etchings in Motherwell's Greenwich studio, and, from 1982, in his summer studio in Provincetown. She concurrently worked with other artists, and, after Motherwell's death, produced with Dan Flavin a series of sculptural

print projects commissioned by the Guggenheim Museum.

Printing, therefore, is Mosley's innate mode of visual expression, the means since the earliest part of her career not only of her art-making, but also of her livelihood. Attendant to such intimacy with the printing process, paper, in the myriad forms with which she has experimented, could not be but a quasi-instinctive choice of material. It is with it, on it, that she improvises; the medium that induces her creative impulse and enables its formulation—this weird reciprocal modulation of ideation and expression caught as well in the pervasive metaphoricity of language as in the allusive latency of painterly wisps of ink in the overlapping circles of *Poolside Series II* (2012) that could be planetary microcosms.

The spatial displacement leading to the completed work, the painting, necessitates a different stance toward the material: a vertical relation to the displayed object, a wider viewing mode, and a more inclusive address that brings the viewer into its communicative intent. The dialogue induced by the direct contact, be it mediated through stencils (a printing technique called *pochair*), or other kinds of interface, with the horizontal, two-dimensional

POLI GALLERY





POOLSIDE SERIES III, 2013, HAND-PRINTED MYLAR CUTOUTS WITH PAINT, MOUNTED ON PANEL, 40 BY 30 INCHES



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Marlene Miller Walking Man



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plate, gains latitude, amplitude, when the surface is submitted to the exposure of a wall. Taking its form out of Mosley's repertory of printed visual elements, the mixed-media painting is the product of a combinatory process that evolves, by means of juxtapositions precluding perspectival depth, from a composite state into a composition. Thus, in *Alphaville II* (2010; paint and charcoal on paper with an overlay of printed tissue) the solemn silhouette of a naked female body is hand-traced with charcoal. Paint, however, is more often the material of the concluding gesture that assigns the work to the category of painting, mirthfully subduing taxonomic exigencies.

If Mosley's figuration stays clear from naturalism—"no pubic hair" was my remark at the sight of *Alphaville's* nudes—it might not be devoid of personal references. Indeed, while at work on her *Poolside Series*, she was asked last summer to speak about her collaboration with Motherwell on the occasion of *Beside the Sea*, the retrospective exhibition of his work at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum.² Such coincidence invites the thought of a kindred inspiration from the auditory and visual experience of "the violent splashing of the waves against the bulkhead . . . at

high tide"³ visually echoed in the splattered blue paint of *Poolside I*.

The structural rigor informing the artist's mixed-media paintings may also have derived in part from her long working relationship with Robert Motherwell. This productive friendship associated Mosley with one of the last Abstract-Expressionist artists and an articulate proponent of the Modernist precepts that could have fostered the overriding insistence of her compositional concerns. This vivid awareness of Modernist canons was mitigated in turn by a dialogue with contemporary artists facilitated by the location of her studio in New York. Although an account of Catherine Mosley's formative years as an artist may allude to the genesis of her work, it can only be a circuitous means of access to its inviting immediacy. ▀

CHRISTINE DE LIGNIÈRES is an artist who lives in New York and teaches at the School of Visual Arts.

NOTES

1. Lucy R. Lippard, et al., *Pop Art* (Praegers, 1966), p. 86.
2. Christopher Busa, "Introduction," and John Yau, "Robert Motherwell, *Beside the Sea*," *Provincetown Arts*, issue 2012/13.
3. John Yau, *ibid.*



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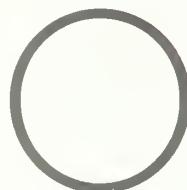
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Ives Gammell, Mary Hackett,

AND FRANCIS THOMPSON'S
"THE HOUND OF HEAVEN"

By Elizabeth Ives Hunter



FALL THE artists who have worked in Provincetown during the twentieth century, no two could appear more different than painters Mary Hackett (1906–1989) and R. H. Ives Gammell (1893–1981). Despite the fact that their residence in Provincetown overlapped for many years and each had a studio at the Fenway Studios building in Boston, their approaches to the art

of painting represent almost polar opposites: Gammell was a classically educated artist who became a teacher himself, and his work reflected American Realism; Hackett was self-taught and experimented with a representational style. That said, each was inspired by Francis Thompson's poem "The Hound of Heaven" and used it as a springboard for a personal artistic statement.

THE POET AND THE POEM

Francis Thompson (1859–1907) was the son of an underpaid but dedicated doctor whose practice was among the poorest of England's Lancashire factory workers. After failing to meet the requirements for the priesthood, and later for the medical profession, he left home at the age of twenty-four and lived on the London streets for the next three years. What little money he did make from odd jobs went to support the opium habit he had acquired during his medical training.

Experiences from his years spent living on the street and under bridges contributed vitally to Thompson's poetic career, which began with his rescue and rehabilitation under the guiding hand of Wilfrid Meynell and his wife, poet Alice. "The Hound of Heaven" was the outcome of a profound psychological and spiritual crisis and was written while Thompson recuperated from his life on the streets. Thompson was not conventionally religious. His thinking, as revealed in the notebooks and manuscripts in the collection of Boston College, went far beyond his Christian and Catholic heritage and was enhanced by his studies of ancient religions and their symbolism.

For several decades after his death, Thompson's fame rested chiefly on the widespread appeal of "The Hound of Heaven." In 182 lines, the poem describes the soul's search for self-fulfillment, which is expressed early in the poem as a flight from an unknown power described as "Him." No answer or respite comes from the

human or the natural worlds. When the inner depths of the mind are stripped of all illusions, submission is made to the pursuer, the "hound of heaven," whose stern voice gives way to love and acceptance. There is nothing sentimental in the transformation, as the stark reality of death remains to be confronted. Even at the end of the poem, the invitation "Rise, clasp My hand, and come!" is left open since the journey is not over, although the goal is assured. Here, Thompson's own experience of self-doubt and pain is clearly reflected, as well as his eventual journey back into faith and healing.

R. H. IVES GAMMELL

Gammell was the third son of a prominent family of bankers from Rhode Island, and he benefited from the cultural and educational advantages of his class. Gammell spent six years at the Groton School and there became thoroughly familiar with Greek and Roman mythology. Daily attendance at chapel was mandatory, although in later years he did not attend church except for family funerals and weddings. Despite that, there was a distinctly spiritual side to his personality.

He knew that he wanted to be a painter from the age of ten, and ultimately convinced his parents to let him study at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, although his father required that he also pass the entrance exam for Harvard University. In 1913 he went to Paris and studied at the Académie Julian but



R. H. IVES GAMMELL, *HOUND OF HEAVEN* (PANELS I, VI, AND XXI), 1941–1956, OIL ON BOARD, 79 BY 31 INCHES
GIFT OF THE R. H. IVES GAMMELL STUDIOS TRUST, 2000.14.002, COLLECTION OF MARYHILL MUSEUM OF ART



returned to the United States with the outbreak of the First World War. He served in army intelligence and returned to Boston after the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, convinced that the best teachers available were in the Boston area. He soon connected with William M. Paxton, who became his mentor and friend, in Provincetown and in Boston, until the latter's death in 1941.

Paxton's influence on Gammell was profound and especially noticeable in improvements in his drawing skills and composition. These two areas were especially important to Gammell because he was inspired to paint murals and large-scale allegorical paintings. He had a strong intellectual bent and wanted to use painting as a way of expressing philosophical insights. Allegory has never been well accepted in this country, but that fact did not deter him.

The 1930s began as a very productive decade for Gammell, but as the Nazi Party rose to power

in Germany he became increasingly fearful that the inevitable war could destroy virtually all evidence of Western civilization. At the same time, the rise of Modernism throughout the art world, and the abandonment of traditional criteria for determining and defining artistic excellence, filled him with horror and an increasing sense of isolation. These, and other more personal factors, combined to bring on a psychological breakdown.

During his recovery, Gammell began reading the work of Carl Jung and so discovered the way to approach what he saw as the greatest undertaking of his artistic life—the twenty-one panels of the *Hound of Heaven* sequence. Symbols were drawn from Greek and Roman mythology, biblical sources, and anthropological studies from around the world. In the paintings, these elements express visually the deepest human psychic experiences and leave room for individual interpretation so that each viewer can own the work.

I am Gammell's goddaughter and my father was his assistant for fifty years. I grew up watching the *Hound of Heaven* being painted and participated in the process to some extent, particularly in Panel VI, which goes with the phrase "and under running laughter" in line five of the poem.

Gammell's training was a combination of the academic (what the mind knows about form) and impressionist (what the eye sees as light falls across form). In this panel, Trickster (a deity in mythology who "plays tricks" or otherwise breaks the rules, sometimes with malevolent intent) flies above two jesters throwing cards into the air, and the cards shower down around them. Uncle Ives wanted the falling cards to look realistic but found that he needed to see cards fall because imagination alone seemed to produce mechanical patterns. So one Sunday afternoon, when I was six, I stood on the balcony in the studio and tossed cards down to the floor below while he



sketched; then three of his students gathered up the cards and brought them back up to me. It was great fun to throw the cards and watch the grownups scurry around to get them.

Each of the twenty-one panels of Gammell's interpretation of the poem is rich with symbolism drawn from cultures and mythologies going back through human history. A closer look at the first and last panels provides a valuable summation of the work.

Panel I defines the protagonist—the *cogito, ergo sum*. The protagonist is robed and holds both a book and a key, while behind him a veiled figure signifies Jung's concept of *anima*. The figure behind the cartouche form above the protagonist holds a bloody dagger and a devil's mask, thereby giving symbolic gravitas and also referencing the realization that the protagonist faces the most profound challenge with eternal implications.

The final painting of the sequence, Panel XXI, is keyed to the line of the poem "Hails by me that footfall": the protagonist is robed in white and, under a sheltering wing, is offered the laurel wreath of the victor. The wing recalls verse four of Psalm 91: "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler."

MARY HACKETT

Mary Hackett's family was comfortable financially, though not on the same scale as the Gammells. Her father was a distinguished journalist who had been editor of the *Paris Herald* and the *New York Sunday Tribune*. At eighteen, she married Chauncey Hackett, who had been Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes's law clerk and went on to become a successful Washington lawyer. He was bright, witty, and charming, and their children grew up to lead successful lives.

Hackett began drawing several years before she began to paint. She was a self-taught artist, and it is worth quoting from Keith Althaus's essay on Hackett, which is included in the catalogue of her exhibition at the Cape Cod Museum of Art in 1996:

It has been said of self-taught artists that they paint not just what they see, but also what they know is there, often defying perspective and other conventions to tell us what they know and want to impart, not unlike map-makers who must distort in order to be truthful.

Hackett's creative life took a major turn in the mid-1950s when her husband, because of his relatively advanced age, had to move to a nursing home. It was at that point that she converted to Roman Catholicism and also began psychiatric analysis. In an interview with

Jay Critchley for Provincetown radio WOMR 92.1 FM, which is also reproduced in the exhibition catalogue previously mentioned, Hackett credits the combination of the Church and her psychiatrist with establishing a framework for her life from that time onward.

The impact of Thompson's poem is most clearly seen in a book that Hackett put together, which is now in Jay Critchley's collection. I was privileged to spend an afternoon studying this most personal statement and came away both fascinated by the artistry of her work and aware of the intensely personal nature of her interpretation. Hackett began with a paperback book, published by Loyola University in Chicago, which included Thompson's poem and scholarly commentaries. She pasted drawings, small paintings, and photographs above certain passages of the poem and added her own writings, which are short reflections and commentaries directly relating to her life, her family, and her circle of friends. The book stands as a highly personal interpretation of Thompson's poem.

Hackett struggled constantly with self-doubt and alcohol. She ultimately was able to overcome the former and give up the latter, though not without significant struggle. She seems to be the protagonist in her artistic interpretation of Thompson's poem, and in the intimate sketches of her book she brings his words and her experience together in a powerful synthesis.



Gammell wrote the following in a foreword to a collection of the panels:

Eventually I decided that it would involve only a slight change in terminology to consider "The Hound of Heaven" as a history of the experience commonly called emotional breakdown rather than as the story of a specifically religious conversion. The change did not, it seemed to me, traduce the poet's intention. It suggested, however, a construction capable of conveying the universality of his subject to many persons. . . .

In "The Hound of Heaven," Thompson touches on a universal chord: one of self-doubt and darkness and a journey toward grace. We are enriched by Thompson's personal story and the eloquence of his classic work, and the powerful artwork inspired by this legacy. ☐

ELIZABETH IVES HUNTER, retired Director of the Cape Cod Museum of Art, is now working as an independent consultant to small museums and individual collectors.

A SELECTION OF THE PAGES IN MARY HACKETT'S BOOK, WITH ARTWORK AND WRITINGS INSPIRED BY "THE HOUND OF HEAVEN"
COLLECTION OF JAY CRITCHLEY



Remembering Murray Reich

(1932–2012)

By Joel Meyerowitz

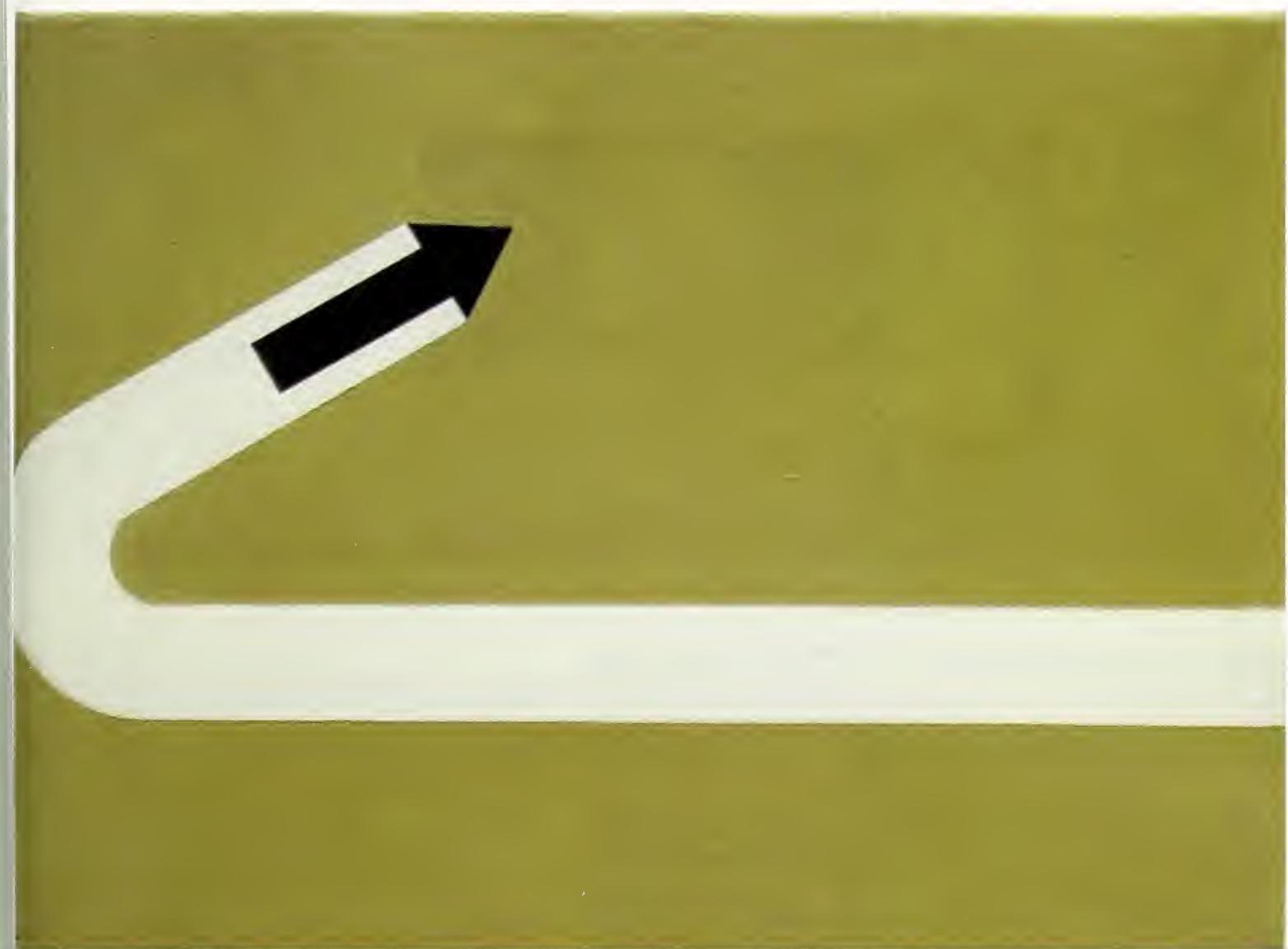


MURRAY REICH IN HIS STUDIO IN 2005 PHOTO BY ELIZABETH WEATHERFORD

MURRAY REICH WAS my friend from almost the very minute we met in 1967 while I was packing my car in front of the Hotel Odessa in Paris, where I had spent six weeks. As I was readying to leave for points east, he called to me over the car top to ask if I knew of a guy named Joel Meyerowitz staying in the hotel . . . the rest is our history. He said he was a former art teacher of my brother Rick, and Rick had told him to look me up when he got to Paris. So I unpacked the car and we walked to La Coupole, where we sat outside at one of the boulevard-facing tables

and talked of our lives and plans. And so began what would be one long conversation that only came to an end in April 2012, when Murray died.

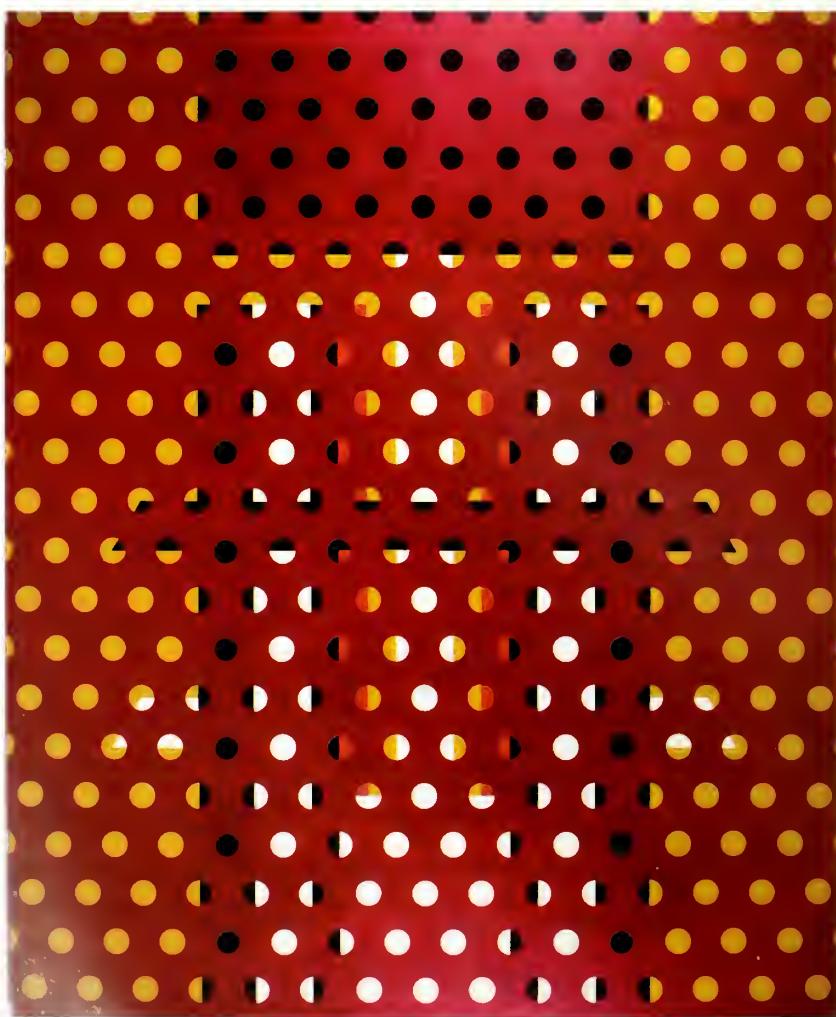
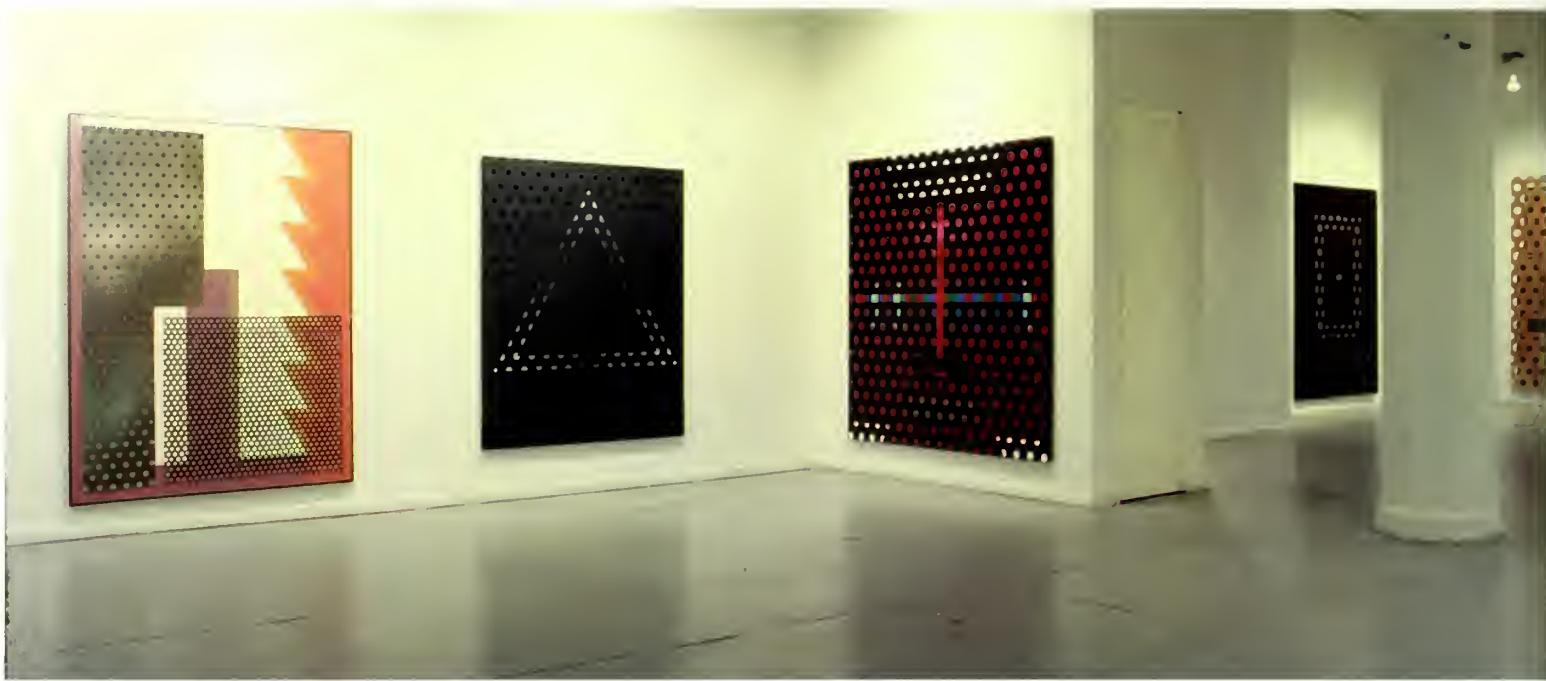
I think of him as the best friend I always wanted and was fortunate enough to have found that summer day forty-five years ago. And with his passing, not only did all of us who loved him lose a friend, father, husband, grandfather-to-be, fishing buddy, and remarkable artist, but we also lost a rare expression of the classical ideal of the painter's painter. Murray had, sometime in the '80s, gone *hors de combat*, "laying down his arms," as he once said to me. The mystery of his decision is now lost to all of us—although I'm sure many of us have speculated,



REVERSE ARROW, 2004, ACRYLIC, GRAPHITE ON CANVAS, 41 BY 56 INCHES



UNTITLED, 2007, ACRYLIC WITH METALLIC COLORS ON CANVAS, 40 BY 92 INCHES



(ABOVE) OPENINGS ON SPRING, 1988, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 81 BY 67 INCHES
(TOP) INSTALLATION VIEW OF A SOLO EXHIBITION AT ARTISTS SPACE IN NEW YORK IN 1989

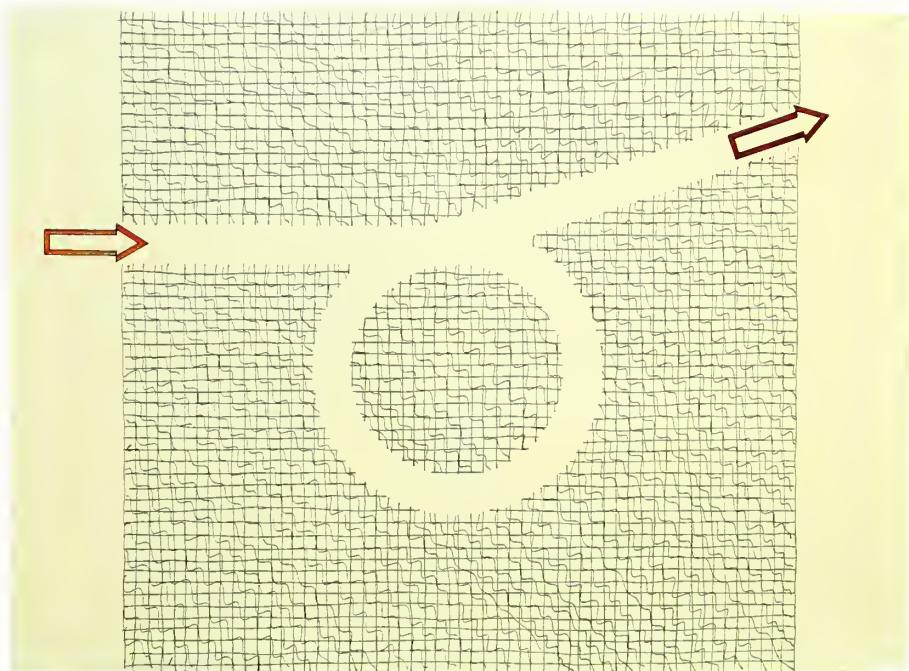
as friends do, as to the real reasons, since Murray was someone who loved to wage combat of all sorts, artistic, intellectual, emotional, ethical, and even sometimes coming in close for the risky, dangerous personal encounter. He was a challenging *provocateur* when he was in full stride, bringing pleasure to the duel with his willingness to engage and go deep and not hold a grudge in the aftermath of any argument.

Leaving speculation aside as to his reasons, we saw him turn away from the politics of the Art World and go deep into his studio for the next twenty-five years to consider the handful of questions he had collected over his first forty years or so of living an artist's life. Those questions: representation versus abstraction, harmony and symmetry applied in a dissonant form, color palettes that were intentionally "ugly" or difficult to love, dimensional illusion and the planes and spaces it hid in or created. And then there was, perhaps for Murray, the biggest question of all: Process. How he loved the unexpected image that appeared once he had established a germ of an idea and then saw how the process of execution might lead him somewhere he could not anticipate or visualize. I suspect he loved that trip most of all. Of course, there were also other personal inquiries known only to artists who stand before their work in the long solitude of the afternoons and nights, contemplating arguments with themselves and their chosen burden of history, which they bring with them into the studio. It is often a long duel with oneself that is the outcome of these musings—and Murray was good at this!

He knew who his masters were and showed them respect and deference, and yet was unwilling to take some further step of his own to engage with them out there in the tussle of the world—as every younger artist must, if he or she wants to press the eternal generational argument, which history shows us is what we must do to redraw the art map and locate ourselves on it. Although he received a Guggenheim Fellowship and an NEA Grant, later showed at Artists Space, and had a few interesting commissions come his way, as well as showing a few times in recent years, he turned away from that world and went deeper into teaching. Then, after years of teaching—and many would say that he was a great teacher, generous and tough, provocative and playful, and, above all, honest—he began the spiritual journey that filled his later years. Tai chi and then fly-fishing became disciplines he executed with the same sense of wonder that he showed in front

of the canvas, but here he was free from the burden of making a statement of purpose, other than the interior pleasures he drew from his careful and devoted study of both of these new engagements.

I was worried for a while about where the passions of painting would go when Murray retreated from the art scene, but to my surprise and pleasure I saw that his inward turn brought him a sense of peace and acceptance that marked his last years with a profound reenvisioning of the natural world and its phenomena. Murray could talk about the moods of the river with something like the delight that Courbet might have taken from the way wind passed through trees along a riverbank. Murray, standing in a trout stream, was looking with newfound wonder at the natural world and its seasonal beginnings. He described to me the depth perception of a man standing in moving water, and the LSD-like phantoms one tripped along with as one's innermost and subtle perceptions were keyed into new consciousness in the river. He talked about the sudden bloom of tiny insects emerging for their brief lives and becoming the momentary attraction for the waiting trout, as



DRAWING SERIES #3, YEAR UNKNOWN, INK, PENCIL ON PAPER, 22 BY 30 INCHES



MURRAY, DUSK, PROVINCETOWN, 1977 PHOTO BY JOEL MEYROWITZ

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well as the angle and play of the light, the wind, and the way birdsong entranced him as he took the wind's measure while preparing for his cast. He described the interplay of light and wind with the movement of the water, the density of shadows, both on the surface and below it, the games one would play to lure the trout out of hiding by the flies one chose for each particular moment of any season. All of these were glowing poems of wonder by a naturalist from Brooklyn.

There is yet another chapter that came fairly late in the game, but it came with the big questions attached, and Murray rose to it like a trout to the light. The old ache about "representation versus abstraction" came to him circuitously, by way of his son's earlier interest in the momentum possible within the frame of the graphic novel-style comic books he was reading. Murray picked something up from that observation by Zeke, and his latest paintings, the *Arrow* series, began. It started with photographs, observations that Murray saved to film, and, like his collection of Tramp Art or hat blocks, the arrow in all its variety and quotidian abundance became something to see, study, and play with. He made a stunning collection of street photographs that were, in themselves, highly observant, humorous, intellectually rigorous, and disciplined—like everything he did—and they were Photographs! We had been talking about the utility and potential of photographs for more than forty years—he had even been a course-changing factor in my own life as a photographer when he suggested I take my family to Cape Cod in 1976, a time when my work was ready for a change. That decision, and a March trip to Provincetown with Murray and my young son Sasha, surely remade my life and helped me to find my way.

So there it was for Murray, the big dichotomy: an arrow is representational, and he spent a whole life defending abstraction. Great problem! And Murray simply looked it in the eye, saw the argument, and went into it with a new fusion of his parts that struck me as though he were a man lifting his arms again, one last time, to enter the fray. These late paintings are austere, near enough to pure signage as to make them *seem simple*; they show us a *way*, and in that small step fulfill their representational calling. But underlying that direction is a formal, abstract premise that works subtly on the viewer, and thus the trip it sends one on results in a new and surprising awareness, slowly earned. These are tough and beautiful paintings.

I think my friend was finally at peace with the journey his life took, although it may not have been what he hoped it would be in the course of the artist's life he lived. Still, it was the one that his process provided, and he embraced it fully. ▀

JOEL MEYEROWITZ is a photographer who has published nineteen books, most recently, a fifty-year, two-volume retrospective book, *Taking My Time*, by Phaidon. Meyerowitz was the only photographer allowed to work inside Ground Zero in the weeks and months following 9/11, and these photographs have been collected in the book *Aftermath*. He spent thirty-five years in Provincetown, where Cape Light, his now classic color book, was made. He and his wife, Maggie Barrett, are living in Europe this year.

Hippopotamus Story

By Peter Hutchinson



ON MY RECENT annual trip to France to visit Jackie Matisse Monnier, I had a date with a Hippopotamus. Well, not exactly a date but I took a bath in a hippopotamus—did I mention that it was blue and a sculpture by the French artist François Lalanne?

Perhaps you might think this to be a segue to a more serious subject, such as global warming, the fiscal cliff, or nuclear arms control, but no, I just want to leave you with the idea of taking a bath in the belly of a blue water horse on the very day the world did not end.

Peter Hutchinson
12/21/12

*PETER HUTCHINSON was an early member of the Land Art movement, and later cofounder of the Narrative Art movement of the 1970s, and has written on the influence of science fiction on art. (See *Dissolving Clouds*, published by Provincetown Arts Press.) Hutchinson has been a presence in the Provincetown art community since 1962 and has resided in Provincetown full-time since 1981. His work is in galleries and museums in New York, Europe, and Provincetown.*

cover feature

BRIDGING



THE LOWLAND

The Work of Jhumpa Lahiri

By Christopher Busa

All vital truth contains the memory of all that for which it is not true. — *D. H. Lawrence*

IN THE SPRING of 1997, Jhumpa Lahiri, accompanied by a friend, drove from Boston to Provincetown to explore the Fine Arts Work Center, which had just offered her a seven-month residency beginning in October. She was apprehensive, reluctant, with questions about what sort of place simply trusted the inner compass of the Fellows to produce creative work. Lahiri had written creatively in elementary and junior high school, but the bulk of her developing writing had been scholarly, examining the writing of distinguished authors. She earned three master's degrees from Boston University, one in English, one in Comparative Literature, a third in Creative Writing. Her mentor in the writing program was the novelist Leslie Epstein, who encouraged her to write fiction while in graduate school. "Whenever we ran into each other," Jhumpa explained, "he'd say, 'Don't forget that you are a writer.'" Her ambition became emboldened despite the respected caution of her immigrant parents, who nudged her toward the stability of an academic career.

She was greeted on her first visit by Roger Skillings, chairman of the Writing Committee, and he took her around the grounds, showing her the Stanley Kunitz Common Room, where public events take place. This former storage space for coal would now be dedicated, Kunitz had once declared, to a higher form of energy—the imagination. Surrounding the Common Room were studio spaces for visual Fellows, a print shop with presses once used by Robert Motherwell and Michael Mazur, a photo lab, a computer room, a periodical room, a library, and administrative offices. The Fellows would live in the Pearl Street compound, the original working buildings of a former lumberyard and railroad stop. Lahiri had grown up in the "Ocean State" of Rhode Island and knew well the rhythms of a seashore town, especially its solitude in winter, when many homes are shuttered as owners return to their real lives in cities. Scattered on either side of the Common Room were residential cottages, allowing visual artists to have quarters separate from their studios. Writers stayed in their work spaces, and Lahiri would live on the top floor of what is called the Barn.

PHOTO BY LIANA MIUCCIO

She followed Roger Skillings up the stairs into an open loft, where there was space for cooking, sleeping, eating, bathing, and writing in a more-or-less shared area. She told me she felt a bounce in her chest at that moment. She was no longer a student; it was time to make the transition from scholar to writer.

She said to Roger, "Can I live here?"

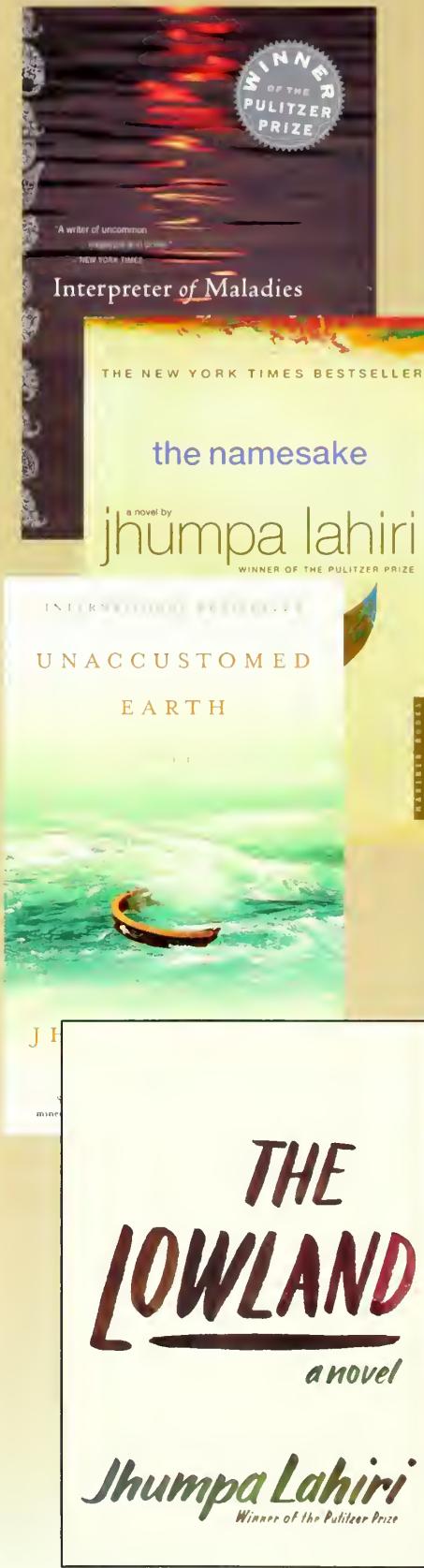
The founders of the Work Center were artists and writers and like-minded people who knew that having a career was different from earning a degree and that surviving as an artist was a decades-long endeavor, like a second maturity. Stanley Kunitz, who did so much to foster the growth of the Work Center, defined this psychological transformation for generations of those who were eager to live as artists: "The first duty of the poet is to create the person who will write the poems."

Growing up as an Indian-American, Lahiri lived in a kind of border zone, a lowland between cultures where language and tradition, East and West, were sometimes in conflict, sometimes harmonious. The word *identity* might signify Jhumpa Lahiri's middle name—in fact, she has two of them. In the Indian tradition, children are given a "pet name," or nickname, and a "good name," which is used as their official name. Like Gogol in her novel *The Namesake*, Jhumpa became identified by her pet name. She discussed this dilemma in a 2003 *New York Times* interview:

My name, Jhumpa, which is my only name now, was supposed to be my pet name. My parents tried to enroll me in school under my good name, but the teacher asked if they had anything shorter. Even now, people in India ask why I'm publishing under my pet name instead of a real name. . . . I actually have two good names, Nilanjana and Sudeshna. My mother couldn't decide. All three are on the birth certificate. I never knew how to write my name.

While Lahiri's identity may remain obscured to readers, she is plainly known and acclaimed through her short stories and novels. She enthralls her readers with her deft storytelling and vivid evocations of intimate, close-up scenes, in which the most ordinary of details become devastating. The slow accumulation of concrete facts—voices, thoughts, actions—builds a world studded with salient moments and revelation. I am reminded of Gogol, her protagonist in *The Namesake*, who is powerfully affected as a young man after a visit to the Taj Mahal, "the marble mausoleum that glows gray and yellow and pink and orange depending on the light." He decides to become an architect, savoring the details of buildings he encounters in America and India. In joining character to character and people to place with a seamless synthesis of language, he creates an articulate universe.

In the summer of 1997, while defending her dissertation, she worked as an intern at *Boston* magazine. She was eager to start publishing the stories she had been refining for years, almost



secretly. The first story that "worked," she said, was "A Real Durwan," which she wrote in 1992, when she was twenty-five, a student in the Boston University writing program. She sent her stories to various literary magazines, but received mostly rejections. An exercise, she said, that "toughened my resolve to write better."

Her dissertation, "Accursed Palace: The Italian Palazzo on the Jacobean Stage (1603–1625)," focused on the role of the palazzo as the architectural setting for the revenge tragedies of three playwrights in Jacobean England. Like

Shakespeare, Middleton, Marston, and Webster, the playwrights she examined, tended to set their work in foreign countries. Even at this point in her examination of other writers, Lahiri was exploring the "architecture" of a story, how a sense of country and place inspired and motivated the emotional development and behavior of characters.

In October of 1997, she began her Fellowship with nine other writing Fellows—poets or fiction writers—and ten visual artists, who were painters, photographers, or sculptors. Lahiri had been living in Boston since 1989 and believed she had made the right decision, to pursue her writing; she was determined to make it work. She did not know at the time that the stories she was writing would win the Pulitzer Prize when collected in 1999 as *Interpreter of Maladies*. "A Temporary Matter" was the first story she wrote in the Barn, the first piece of writing she did in Provincetown, and the first published in the *New Yorker*. In an e-mail, she noted, "It was a very intense writing experience, very rare, still very vivid."

"A Temporary Matter" presents us with Shoba and Shukumar, a young, professional couple, who have lived on a "quiet tree-lined street" in the Boston area for three years at the opening of the story. Shukumar, thirty-five years old, is in graduate school, and Shoba, thirty-three, is an editor and proofreader, working in an office "where she searched for typographical errors in textbooks and marked them, in a code she had once explained to him, with an assortment of colored pencils. She would do the same for his dissertation, she promised, when it was ready. He envied her the specificity of her task, so unlike the elusive nature of his. He was a mediocre student who had a facility for absorbing details without curiosity."

And yet it is the small, elusive details that intrude into their lives in a transformative way when the couple receives notice that their electricity will be shut off at eight p.m. each evening for one hour for the next five days, and they adapt to having dinner by candlelight, and speaking intimately, as if for the first time truly meeting each other. Six months earlier, pregnant with their first child, Shoba had gone into labor three weeks before her due date and the baby was born dead. Shukumar, who had been away at an academic conference, arrived at the hospital in time to hold the stillborn baby in his arms, the doctor suggesting he do so to help in the grieving process. Before an ultrasound, Shoba had told the doctor they didn't want to know the sex of the infant, but Shukumar knows from holding him. On the last night of their séance-like evenings, Shoba announces she has found a new apartment. It had taken her all five nights to tell her husband that she was leaving him. Shukumar, in turn, reveals to Shoba that the baby was a boy. Lahiri concludes, "They wept together, for the things they now knew."

Another story Lahiri worked on at the Work Center, "Sexy," was later published in the *New Yorker*, and included in *Interpreter*. Miranda, a young woman working in the fund-raising department of a public radio station in Boston,

There's a pivotal scene in the novel The Namesake in which the Ganguli family drives to Cape Cod and then Gogol and his father, Ashoke, walk along a breakwater until they reach land's end. They don't have a camera, so Ashoke tells Gogol:

"Try to remember it always. Remember that you and I made this journey, that we went together to a place where there was nowhere left to go."

This scene also appears in filmmaker Mira Nair's adaptation of The Namesake, which was released in 2006. Family connections are woven throughout this production, on-screen and off-screen. Lahiri and her parents, Amar and Tia, appear on-screen in small roles. The actors who play Ashima and Ashoke, Tabu and Irrfan Khan, spent time with Amar and Tia to prepare for their roles. (Khan also plays an Indian immigrant in several episodes of the HBO series In Treatment, titled "Sunil," which includes an episode cowritten by Lahiri, who also served as story consultant for the entire storyline.)

begins an affair with an exotic-looking gentleman of Indian descent, Dev, whom she meets at the perfume counter of Filene's. On an excursion, they visit the Mapparium, located at the Christian Science Center. Built in 1935, it is a glass globe depicting oceans in shades of blue that indicate depth, and countries in colors that show their colonial affiliations of the period. While the oceans have remained intact in their underwater topography, the countries have now vastly changed affiliations. On the glass bridge of the Mapparium, Dev points out the location of India, where he is from, and the young woman looks for London, where her coworker's cousin's husband is presently having an affair with a woman he met on an airplane. Geographic distances are brought close up, visible at a glance. This simulated "world" is no longer merely a symbol of human habitation and history; it has become a literal setting, a place that embodies action and personal experience.

Another feature of the Mapparium is its unusual acoustics, the curving glass bouncing voices with strange distortions. Across the thirty-foot span of the bridge, Dev tests the anomaly by whispering faintly to Miranda, "You're sexy." No one has ever called her sexy before, and the word lingers in her thoughts, taking on larger meaning, compelling her to go shopping for the kind of clothes she thinks a mistress should wear.

The story resonates as well in the contrast between the first-hand experience of the young woman and the second-hand experience of her coworker's cousin whose husband is having an affair. Miranda doesn't actually wear her new clothes until she is babysitting the son of her coworker's betrayed cousin. Each scenario informs the other in elucidating the meaning of "sexy" as "loving someone you don't know," the



FROM THE FILM *THE NAMESAKE* COURTESY OF MIRABAI FILMS

definition uttered by the precocious seven-year-old, who persuades Miranda to put on the sexy dress she bought for her mistress role, but never wore. A word, a name, can identify and bewilder. Lahiri seems to isolate an epiphany that D. H. Lawrence called "vital truth," in which all that is true is accompanied by the memory of when it was not, illuminating one's momentary certainty as only one aspect of a far more complex drama.

"My grandfather always says that's what books are for, to travel without moving an inch."

— Ashoke, in *The Namesake*

The sharing of secrets, the revelation of self to others, and self to self, constitutes the essential drama of Lahiri's tale-telling. Sometimes essential truths may be shouted in public, and be ignored, as Lahiri suggests in the very early story "A Real Durwan," in which sixty-four-year-old Boori Ma, twice-a-day "sweeper of the stairwell" in an apartment building in Calcutta, mutters to the tenants—or to no one in particular—about the luxury of her life before Partition in 1947, which divided India from Pakistan and caused massive relocations, leaving her stranded from "a husband, four daughters, a two-story brick house, a rosewood *almari*, and a number of coffer boxes"

A new water basin for shared use is installed in her building, an improvement that increases the

pride of the tenants and gives them a new awareness of "elegance." But the basin is stolen while Boori Ma is absent from her duty—she has left her post beneath the letter boxes at the entrance of the building, driven away by the increased number of workers coming in and out of the building to make further improvements. She is cast out by the upscale tenants, who want a "real" doorkeeper, a real *durwan*. In sweeping away this displaced soul, the apartment dwellers sweep away reminders of the past, political and social, and in doing so lose an element of their own humanity.

These issues of social class show in embryo the range and depth of Lahiri's exploration of political passion, so fully realized in her latest novel, *The Lowland*, forthcoming this September, in which class struggle lives alongside personal upheaval in the divergent life choices of two brothers from the southern section of Calcutta called Tollygunge. In the opening pages, Subhash is thirteen, his brother, Udayan, fifteen months younger. Lahiri conjures a neighborhood of mostly middle-class families, with a mosque and markets nearby. Within the enclave of homes, there are two oblong ponds with a lowland between them: as the ponds fill with water during the monsoon season, the lowland itself eventually becomes flooded with water and cannot be seen. Lahiri writes of this lowland:

The flooded plain was thick with water hyacinth. The floating weed grew aggressively. Its leaves caused the surface to appear solid. Green in contrast to the blue of the sky.

Water becomes walkable, refusing to reflect the sky. Remarkable circumstances allow for the expressing of extraordinary feelings. Eventually, the two brothers share parallel and disparate lives: Udayan stays in India, where he becomes



JHUMPA LAHIRI PHOTO BY ELENA SEIBERT

attracted to the tenets of the Naxalite uprising; Subhash moves to America, where he finds his own calling in the study of oceanography in Rhode Island. In the first scene, Udayan and Subhash are mere teenagers, their only adventure trespassing on the grounds of the tony Tolly Club, walled off from the neighborhood, a hundred-acre oasis for the aristocratic entertainments introduced by British colonization, such as golf, tennis, swimming, riding, dining, dancing, and music. At dusk, they clamber over one low section of the wall and find themselves in an alternative world. It is a fateful event, a note of discord that reverberates for the life of the book.

Subhash had never seen such grass, as uniform as a carpet, unfurled over sloping contours of earth. Undulating like dunes in a desert, or gentle dips and swells in a sea. It was shorn so finely on the putting green that it felt like moss when he pressed against it. The ground below was as smooth as a scalp, the grass appearing a shade lighter there.

Such vivid transformations of everyday experience animate the world Lahiri takes us through, like a guide, giving instruction lightly about important factual information and history. Yet the tour grows as an organic tale, taut with fibers of fascinating detail, from the knotted weeds of the lowland to a beach in Rhode Island where "Seaweed was strewn everywhere, rockweed with air bladders like textured orange grapes, lonely scraps of sea lettuce, tangled nests of rusty kelp caught in the waves." The characters' lives, their dreams and losses, are reflected in the land itself, imbedded in the author's intimate language of place. When I remarked to Lahiri that I was especially struck by her profound

fairness to her characters, she said, "I hope there are redeeming qualities in everyone." The social matrix of her characters, however foreign the location, offers all of us a support system, a familiar and certain truth refracted from alternative points of view.

I spoke on the phone with Lahiri this spring on a Sunday—noon my time in Provincetown, six in the evening for her in Rome, where she lives with her husband, Alberto, and her two young children, Noor and Octavio. During our conversation, her children were sometimes audible in the background, a pleasant reminder of the enduring importance of family in her stories. She has been learning Italian for years and told me she loves speaking the language and is beginning to write in it. She can banter in the Bengali of her girlhood, but can't understand formal speech on Indian television. Her husband, a journalist and editor of Greek-Guatemalan origin, born in Mexico, is an American citizen. I wondered what languages they speak in the house. English, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Bengali? Lahiri's international perspective informs her work, refining her focus on the Indian diaspora, sharpening our own understanding of international and social relations, from the golf courses of Calcutta to the lawns of suburban Rhode Island.

I asked Lahiri where the idea for her latest novel came from. "The *Lowland* is a book I've been trying to write since I was a Fellow at the Work Center," she explained. "I first told the idea to one of my former Fellows that year. I said, 'I've got this crazy idea for a book and I'm terrified if I can make it work.' She said, 'You've got to make it work.' She was the one. I dedicated the book to her."

Lahiri has dedicated the novel to her husband and to Carin Clevidence, her friend in the program that year of conception. Recently, Clevidence wrote her own novel, *The House on Salt Hay Road* (Macmillan, 2011). I asked Lahiri about the "idea" she divulged to Clevidence, and she offered some background.

"I should back up and say that I had a question about something that happened in Calcutta, in the neighborhood where my father was raised, which I knew a little about from visiting," she told me. "I heard about this incident that had taken place, a very violent incident. I heard relatives talking about it. Not in great detail, but enough to intrigue me. So that year I was a Fellow, my father came up to the Work Center for a week in November."

This visit not only inspired her work on *The Lowland* but provided inspiration for another story as well:

"One night we had dinner with Jeff Eugenides and his wife, Karen Yama, who lived below me. I think it was Jeff who asked my father, What brought you to America? And my father, in his way of rendering this anecdote many times in the past, talked about the experience of moving to Cambridge in 1969 and living with this woman who was 103 years old, and that the moon shot had just happened. And it was that telling, the particular way my father told the story, which I had heard many times in the past. But for some reason, him saying it in the Barn in Provincetown at the Work Center that evening, that was the moment I felt, Oh God, I've got to write this story."

This became "The Third and Final Continent," the concluding story of *Interpreter of Maladies*. The fictional father has traversed India, England, and America and has been a good father; his child has achieved modest success. He describes his introduction to America as a young man, when he stayed in a rooming house owned by a 103-year-old woman, whose odd habits and old-fashioned manners are both bizarre and endearing. At the end of the story, he has been on this continent for thirty years. Through some refraction of wisdom, inspired by relocation, the lived life has attained an aura, a glow giving off an expression of inner life.

While the astronauts, heroes forever, spent mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world for nearly thirty years. I know that my achievement

Reading Jhumpa Lahiri's Work

BY INDIRA GANESAN



To read Jhumpa Lahiri is to recognize the quiet, serious, and highly intelligent voice that is uniquely her own, a voice that is built on American and South Asian sense and sensibilities. The effect is, for me, less about story, though the plot is important, and more about something ineluctable. Rereading *Unaccustomed Earth* on a bus recently, removing myself from the din of the voices around me, I noticed the kinship that builds slowly between reader and writer.

That Friday, on the bus home, I became absorbed in "A Choice of Accommodations," a short story from the collection that is, on the surface, about a married heterosexual couple attending a wedding at a prep school where the husband studied. Amit was left at the school to continue his studies while his parents left for India, a move that still stuns him in its unexpectedness and in the resultant homesickness and loneliness. Amit marries Megan, has children, and hopes to rekindle some of the romance in their marriage by taking accommodations in a hotel away from the campus dorms that the wedding couple uses as guest rooms. It is the first in a series of disappointments for Amit revealed in this story.

The wedding he comes to celebrate is that of a woman who captured the hearts of many of the boys at the school, including Amit; she is a breezy patrician daughter in a family who used to invite to their house the boys who had no place to spend holidays.

For Amit, Thanksgiving at the prep school was served with a mixture of genuine interest and patronizing duty on the part of the hosts. The notion of guest and host, those who have and those who do not, is pervasive in immigrant stories. Similar thoughts crowd in a jumble for Amit, together with his sense of an uncertain marriage, to the point that he unintentionally leaves his wife behind at the party to head to their hotel. He walks away from the situation, as he once walked away from his medical studies, a long,

exhilarating exercise, copying the movement perhaps made by his parents long ago.

The notion of abandonment, and forming new alliances, of coupledom, is a subject Ms. Lahiri investigates with precision. One gasps at her skill, her knowledge, and her artistry.

The immigrant's walk is the walk away from home, the impulse to leave what is both familiar and understood behind. The immigrant's knowledge of home is intrinsic, psychic, below the surface, possibly rising when the concept of *not-home* is met. The immigrant moves toward the unknown. The walk becomes akin to the gambler's hope for another chance. It is the notion that physical distance will create a transformation, a way not only to escape but also to construct a new persona, as well as more possibilities. It is as if one wants to cut off one's shadow when one moves, but shadows always follow.

The remedy, however momentary, is love. Here, the story ends with the disturbing, Chekhovian image of Megan's palm receiving Amit's heartbeats, "plainly striking." For me, the use of the word "striking" is a choice that suggests frustration, but also knocking, as if at a door, the unspoken despair of a man who feels, perhaps always, inadequate to be loved and held, not abandoned, and the despair of a woman who has held on, who is abandoned, and who now faces, forcefully, the needs of such a man. It is the sound of love, one heartbeat that strikes into another's skin.

A good writer, a great writer, unleashes the thinking mind as well as the heart in her work. In Jhumpa Lahiri, I found myself forced out of my day-to-day bourgeois acceptance of the status quo, and began to think again.

INDIRA GANESAN is the author of three novels from Alfred A. Knopf, the most recent, *As Sweet as Honey* (2013). She lives in Provincetown as part of the Long-Term Residency Program for former Fellows of the Fine Arts Work Center.



(ABOVE) LAHIRI'S DESK IN ROME; (BELOW) HER DESK IN JIM LECHAY'S WELLFLEET STUDIO WITH SECTIONS OF *THE LOWLAND* SPREAD OUT

is quite ordinary. I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home, and certainly I am not the first. Still, there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have traveled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination.

Available on YouTube is a video of Lahiri's father, Amar, demonstrating in a genial and witty way how to prepare and cook a festive South Asian rice dish called *pulao*. A love of family, of food and tradition, is a common thread throughout Lahiri's work, another layer of detail, like accumulating grains of rice. The cooking and serving of meals are rituals that unite families in all facets of life and tradition, from the most precious of celebrations to times of challenge and grief. In the video, Amar combines a number of ingredients, including basmati rice, cashews, raisins, cardamom pods, cinnamon sticks, cloves, bay leaves, and various other spices. He demonstrates every detail: stirring, timing, sequence, a delight in the interstices of the dish cooking on its own. At the end, he remarks, "Watch closely, this is not written down."

Lahiri spoke to me with warmth about the week her father spent with her in Provincetown during her Fellowship. She would work in the morning, he would mostly read. After lunch, they might go for a long walk through the town, sometimes out along the flat-topped granite boulders of the breakwater in Provincetown harbor, stretching from the first landing site of the Pilgrims to the protective arm of the sheltering Cape tip, where the land curves back upon itself. A scene on such a breakwater appears in the film based on Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*, in which Gogol as a boy walks hand in hand with his father. The breakwater, like the lowland, presents a vivid image of separation, but the water is also a healing presence: there is always, in the end, in the way of tides and time, a coming together and healing. Later in the novel, Gogol will learn how he was named for the

Russian author of a story called "The Overcoat," which his father was reading during a train wreck that he survived. After hearing the story of his namesake, Gogol asks his father if he reminds him of that awful night, and the father says, "Not at all. You remind me of everything that followed."

On one walk with her father, Lahiri asked him to tell her about the violent event that happened in Calcutta in 1971. Though her family lived in America at the time, they heard through relatives in India, as well as Bengali friends in the United States, about the complicated political and social situation surrounding the Naxalite movement, which is the political context for *The Lowland*. As her father told her the story, she felt profoundly aware of the complexity of this situation and had doubts about her ability to make it live in its full potential in her writing. But the more she resisted, the more her friend Carin insisted: "Write the book." Instead, Lahiri wrote two other books, *The Namesake* and *Unaccustomed Earth*, before summoning the concentration to write the novel conceived at the beginning of her career. It was now or never: she had to write *The Lowland*.

In her early childhood in Rhode Island, Lahiri experienced some isolation and segregation due to her Indian-American identity. She spent her formative years in a leafy university town in one of the country's smallest states, speaking Bengali at home and English outside the home. There were no Indian restaurants in Rhode Island at the time. Her American friends never heard her speak Bengali. She bridged two realities: the Bengali traditions of her family's home and her parents' deep ties to India, and the reality she experienced when she went to school and interacted with her peers and teachers. She had grown up as an only child—her one sister was not born until Lahiri was seven and a half years old—and felt a responsibility toward her parents, as children of immigrants often do, in some ways the child becoming the parent.



Lahiri reflected on the challenges her family faced: "English is their second language. From a very young age, my English was better than my parents'. I knew it and they knew it. I felt guilty about it, felt something was wrong. I should not be more authoritative than my parents."

She spent long summers in Calcutta with her extended family, wrestling with contradictions and wondering who she was. I was curious about her expressions of self-doubt, given her brilliant academic successes. But it was not until she formed an identity as a writer that she developed a sense of confidence. She asked herself a question as we were speaking, shortly after her eleven-year-old son, Octavio, occasionally coughing in the background, was told to put a tablet under his tongue.

"What put me on this path to writing?" she mused. "I didn't feel fully like a person taking up space until I got to the Work Center. Apart from better wanting to understand my parents, I think there is a more basic or existential element. Something about being in that Barn, having that desk to work at. Being believed in made me feel 100 percent alive, present instead of an insubstantial presence."

In a *New Yorker* article, "Trading Stories: Notes from an Apprenticeship," she frankly describes this transition: "Being a writer means taking the leap from listening to saying, 'Listen to me.'" Writing became a part of her identity, perhaps serving as a bridge between the two cultures, the two countries she did not feel a full claim to:

When I became a writer my desk became home; there was no need for another. Every story is a foreign territory, which, in the process of writing, is occupied and then abandoned. I belong to my work, to my characters, and in order to create new ones I leave the old ones behind. My parents' refusal to let go or to belong fully to either place is at the heart of what I, in a less literal way, try to accomplish in writing. Born of my inability to belong, it is my refusal to let go.

The growing belief in her ability as a creative writer was a slow process for Jhumpa Lahiri, but her transformation into a successful writer was rather sudden, triggered during her time at the Work Center when an agent found her. The *New Yorker* began publishing her stories, and many accolades accompanied her award of the Pulitzer Prize, so surprising for a first book of short stories by a relatively unknown author.

Lahiri's natural modesty may have delayed the full development of a writer's "stone fort" of a strong ego. She told me that one element of the making of art was distinctly selfish, putting the artist at the center as the creator. Even when she was working on fiction with Leslie Epstein at Boston University, she felt that this dimension of writing was a side thing, a flirtation with being an artist. Equally, she told me, when she was accepted into his class, meeting and befriending fellow students Ha Jin and Peter Ho Davies, she felt it was like an invitation to the White House. Her work was taken seriously.

Lahiri's parents didn't initially encourage her pursuit of an artist's life. As immigrants forging a

new life in a new country, her parents encouraged her to become an academic with credentials to teach at a university. While they did not pressure her to become a doctor or a lawyer, they did want her to do something practical with her passion for literature, and it was a shock to them when she decided to sequester herself in Provincetown and write with a purpose of her own.

"It taught me how to think of myself as an artist," she explained. "I have only been able to spit out those words in the last five years or so, telling someone I am a writer. I thought people would laugh. In college I knew people who had extraordinary belief in themselves, and I admired them—interesting people you meet when you are young, who have this fire. I was drawn to these people, but I felt I was not one of them. I had an antagonistic relationship with who I was that would not let me accept what I wanted to do. I didn't want to express what I didn't like, what embarrassed me."

"Now I realize those things that torment us growing up can give us enormous tools eventually—certainly for artists. Caring about other people, creating and caring, all that trial-by-fire of my childhood, now fulfills me because it has led me to do the work I do."

In a widely discussed article, "My Life's Sentences," commissioned by the *New York Times* for a series called Draft on how writers do their writing, Lahiri shared a key dynamic in her process, the making of vital sentences:

In college, I used to underline sentences that struck me, that made me look up from the page. They were not necessarily the same sentences the professors pointed out, which would turn up for further explication on an exam. I noted them for their clarity, their rhythm, their beauty and their enchantment. For surely it is a magical thing for a handful of words, artfully arranged, to stop time. To conjure a place, a person, a situation, in all its

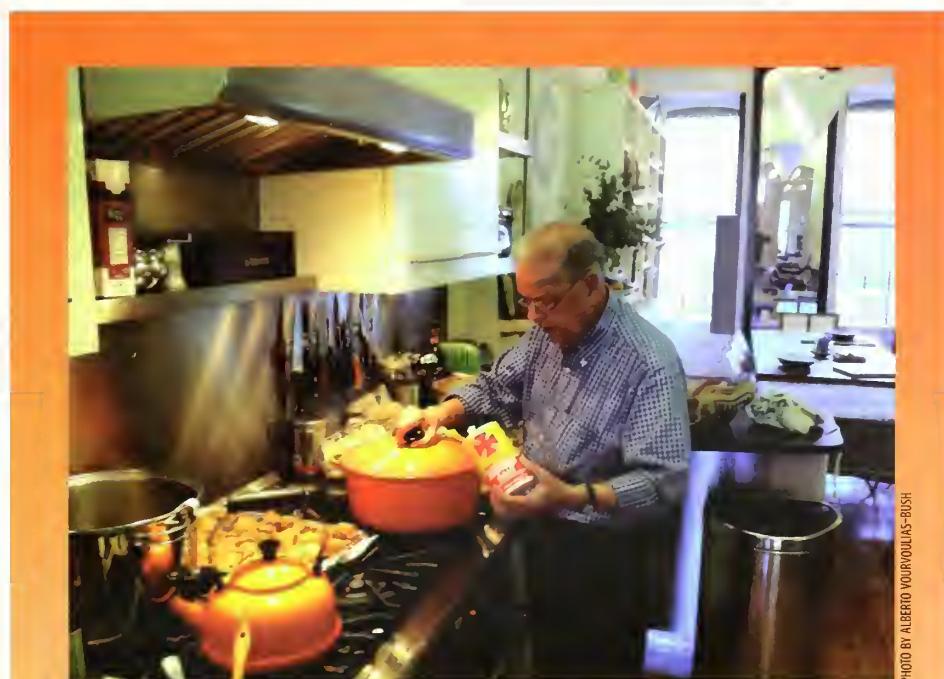


PHOTO BY ALBERTO VOURVOURAS-BUSH

In the kitchen, too, he walks a deliberate line, counting out the raisins that go into his oatmeal (fifteen) and never boiling even a drop more water than required for tea. It is my father who knows how many cups of rice are necessary to feed four, or forty, or a hundred and forty people. He has a reputation for andaj—the Bengali word for "estimate"—accurately gauging quantities that tend to baffle other cooks. An oracle of rice, if you will. . . .

In 1968, when I was seven months old, my father made pulao for the first time. . . . The occasion was my annaprasan, a rite of passage in which Bengali children are given solid food for the first time; it is known colloquially as a bhath, which happens to be the Bengali word for "cooked rice." . . . Since then, he has made pulao for the annaprasans of his friends' children, for birthday parties and anniversaries, for bridal and baby showers, for wedding receptions, and for my sister's Ph.D. party. . . . He could probably rig up a system to make pulao out of a hot-dog cart, were someone to ask.

— from "Rice," *The New Yorker*, 2009

Jhumpa Lahiri at 9 Columbus Square



BY WILLIAM CORBETT

Jhumpa Lahiri entered my family's life as a friend of our daughter Marni. Tamara McKenna, Marni's childhood friend and Jhumpa's Barnard College roommate, introduced them. When Jhumpa first came to our home at 9 Columbus Square in Boston, we all remarked on her beauty. The years having given her a gravity and stately grace, Jhumpa is more beautiful, strikingly so, today. At that time, she worked with Marni at Wordsworth Bookstore in Cambridge. When I dropped in to see them, I often found them stacking the less-browsed shelves, cracking each other up over the antics of one of the store's many personalities. Soon Jhumpa began coming to the house for dinner. Before I knew her as a writer, I knew her as a family friend.

I do not remember the year, but Jhumpa was in BU's writing program when she showed me a few stories. Her feel for language was obvious, but the stories were a little conventional for my taste. It was easy to encourage her, but I'm sure I wasn't much help.

She spent one summer house-sitting at 9 Columbus Square, and that experience would, albeit unknown to me and the family at the time, have greater consequence for her than any advice or comfort I gave her fledgling writing attempts. Jhumpa wrote about that summer in an essay that appeared in a 2011 *New Yorker*. It was then that I learned of the powerful impact our home had on her, the Philip Guston drawings and Seamus Heaney broadsides on our walls, and the books, especially a run of the *Paris Review*, on our shelves.

Jhumpa breathed in whatever was in the air of this working writer's house, and during that quiet summer she began to write what would become the stories in her extraordinary debut, *Interpreter of Maladies*. The Gustons and Heaneys, the books, Beverly's kitchen, where so many writers and artists had dined, the presence of so much art lived with in a casual way, taken for granted like breathing, gave her confidence that whatever she wanted of that world could be hers.

What moved me about her essay is that as a boy I had had the luck of being accepted into the home of novelist Donald Braider and his wife, Carol. There were books, pictures, music, and food that I was avid for without knowing where these appetites would lead. In that house I began to become a poet, clueless as to what that might mean.

After Jhumpa left Boston for Brooklyn, where both our daughters and Tamara McKenna live, I saw her either at my daughter Marni's table or her own or at the readings she gave in Cambridge when a new book appeared. I loved introducing her at her Harvard Book Store readings, and later at the MIT readings I helped arrange for her, because, as she grew older and more celebrated, a natural shyness overtook her. I loved making her feel at home and loved too the lineup of her mother's posse of dressed-to-the-nines Indian ladies in fabulous saris. They were splendidly arrayed in the front row.

I cannot read her work critically and am not interested in having an opinion. I enjoy that she opened for me, as for so many others, a door into a world we might not otherwise have known. She breathed fresh life into the foundational American myth, the American immigrant's story. Jhumpa is a natural short-story writer, but my favorite of her books is her novel *The Namesake*. Its affecting plainness of style artfully communicates the strangeness of the life of a young man, Gogol, whose Indian upbringing meets American realities. I like to talk about books with her because her passions for, say, Mavis Gallant and James Salter are so powerful that the surprise of their work is still with her. Most of all I admire the way she has withdrawn a little from her great success. She seems to know what it is worth and knows, too, how to avoid the excesses Americans demand of their celebrities.

Beverly and I spent most of the years 2011 and 2012 moving from Columbus Square. At some point I realized there was no room for a lifetime's library in our new Brooklyn home, but had no idea what to do with the books. One day it occurred to me that I could look at them as gifts to friends and walk the shelves deciding who ought to get what. For Jhumpa, I boxed up two shelves worth of *Paris Reviews*, the magazine in which she had gone to school in its famous interviews with writers. She put them in her Brooklyn study, where they might be read or at least looked into again, but it's really where they came from that matters. A reminder of the summer she began to follow her imagination into the vivid world she has created.

WILLIAM CORBETT is a poet who lives in Brooklyn, New York, and teaches writing at MIT. He directs the small press Pressed Wafer and is writing a book on the painter Stuart Williams.



RAY ELMAN, *ROCK IN THE WIND*, 2012, OIL AND DIGITAL COLLAGE ON CANVAS, 40 BY 60 INCHES

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION; GIFT OF THE ARTIST

specificity and dimensions. To affect us and alter us, as profoundly as real people and things do.

For an example of an exemplary sentence, she chose one from the beginning of a story, "Araby," in James Joyce's *Dubliners*: "The cold air stung us and we played till our bodies glowed." The action brings a pulse to the sentence, a single sentence pacing a story and jolting the reader into a zone of reflection. In our phone conversation, I asked Lahiri for hints on how she almost mathematically balances her characters, situations, and variety of voices in such a way that a mystery becomes manifest in crystal clarity.

"I don't know how to explain it. I'm not thinking about it in terms of my structure, or anything conscious," she said. "All I know is that I'm working in this fog for a long time and in the end I want to make it clear. I want the sentences to be alive—like that Joyce sentence, which, as you say, is not a particularly profound sentence. It's just that when I read it, I looked up to savor it, alive and breathing."

Lahiri told me that for several years she has been reading the novels of Thomas Hardy, whose gloom is so saturated with the fertility of the nineteenth-century English countryside that it somehow becomes radiant in remembrance and recollection. She reread several of his novels a number of times while she was working on *The Lowland*. She is not sure if anything of Hardy shows through in the way her settings blend with her characters, yet she feels a deep debt to the way Hardy portrays the world.

In the summer of 2009, she took the pages of *The Lowland*, which she had been working on for about a year, to a house her family had rented in Wellfleet, the former house and studio of the artist James Lechay. (In 1997, the year Lahiri first came to Provincetown, *Provincetown Arts* published a profile of Lechay discussing how the artist tends to use a

small chip of blue or green or red in a neutral field of gray, with the small chip casting a tint on the larger field, much like a vivid detail in Lahiri's writing.) Speaking on the phone as if we were chatting in the same room, she confided: "I can tell you a fascinating story having to do with the Lechay house and the Fine Arts Work Center. The real visionary work of this book was done sitting in his studio. Though I never knew him, I feel a connection to him. Powerful. After I left the Work Center, I remained on the mailing list—this was before e-mail—and they sent me notice of a show at the Hudson Walker Gallery. I hung on to it. Didn't look at who painted it. Drawn to the painting, I put it up in the room I was working in at my Brooklyn apartment.

"After a few years, I had my son, I had my daughter, and it became increasingly difficult to work at home. I rented studio space elsewhere in Brooklyn, taking all the little things that

were over my desk, including the postcard, a gray painting. That was 2004. Then, in 2005, we bought a brownstone in Brooklyn and there was space for me to work. This time I did not put up that particular postcard. Time for new things. I put it in my shoe box, visual images I select and make collages from. A crazy thing I have in common with Michael Cunningham, who says, when we don't write, we make collages."

When Lahiri and her family arrived in Wellfleet in June that year, they were greeted with solid rain, obliging them to stay inside and explore the house, with its wide outdoor decks, and Lechay's studio, ideal for inspiring a writer with the felt presence of her predecessors. She set herself up in the studio to work. Toward the end of their stay, she woke in her bedroom, opening her eyes to a painting she had been looking at for two weeks, and thought, *I know this artist, he's the man who painted the painting on the postcard that has been with me for ten years.* "I cannot tell you how I felt," she told me. "I knew this was the wildest sign of some beautiful destiny." □

CHRISTOPHER BUSA is editor of *Provincetown Arts*.



JHUMPA LAHIRI WITH HER HUSBAND, ALBERTO VOURVOULIAS-BUSH, IN ROME PHOTO BY SARA ANTONELLI



LISE BRODY PHOTO BY JOSIE BRODY

For One Thing She Did

By Lise Brody

FOR ONE THING SHE DID is the story of Sycorax, the witch and mother of Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

Although Prospero claims that Sycorax was from Argier (the older form of "Algiers"), I've made her the child of Spanish conversos circa 1510. I am interested in the tensions and contradictions of sixteenth-century Spain—the mistrust fueled by the Counter-Reformation and Inquisition; the frantic efforts of the Church to maintain dominance in a world at the edge of transformation through science and invention; the expanding globe and the repercussions of colonial culture; and the growing demonization of women amidst these unsettling shifts. This strikes me as a rich setting for the life of the powerful, maligned woman whose absence, I believe, is at the very heart of *The Tempest*: a play about power and exploitation, colonialism and the clash of cultures, knowledge, learning, and understanding.

If you have not read *The Tempest* since high school, it might help to be reminded that Sycorax, who is already dead when the play begins, was banished from Argier and left on the magical island, presumably pregnant with Caliban, "For mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible / To enter human hearing." She is repeatedly maligned by Prospero, though he never actually saw her. What he knows, he learned from the spirit Ariel, who was imprisoned in a tree by Sycorax and released long after her death by Prospero in exchange for service. Prospero also enslaves Caliban, the island's only native, whom the shipwrecked Europeans largely regard as less than human. At the end of the play, it is unclear whether Caliban will be taken back to Naples as a slave or left to himself on the island.

*This damn'd witch Scorax,
For mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible
To enter human hearing from Argier
Thou know'st was banish'd; for one thing she did
They would not take her life. . . .*

— Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

Prologue

You can stop that squalling. I will not release you.

Say what you like about me to that wizard, when he comes. He'll let you out. He won't make things much better for you, but he'll enjoy your stories. Go ahead. Give him what he wants.

I will not let you go.

Look at my boy, sprawled in the clay, struggling to give it shape. His hands are still clumsy, but he'll learn. This is his element. Look—already he's molding it more surely. A thick, round form emerges. He is a creator immersed in his work. In a few minutes, he'll look up at me with the pride of accomplishment, and I'll praise him.

Look at me. Sitting on this scant carpet of pine needles, I might be a young wife in a garden terraced by pomegranates and figs, who has left her weaving and sent the nurse off on an errand to enjoy a few minutes' tender play with her firstborn. Only I am naked, and caked with clay, and there is no nurse, and I have had to lock up many predators to protect my firstborn, among them you.

There are pomegranates, though, in a secret grove. You know where they are, and he knows where they are. When you are both enslaved, will you tell?

Spirit, do you know what I look like? Under the clay, perhaps my skin and hair are not gray. My eyes are gray, but only lately. When I was born, I'm told, they were a color without a name: the color of distance.

Spirit, see me: in five years my breasts will flap like dead fish. Today they do not. Today, they have a life of their own—they grow full and frantic in pace with my son's hunger. They release and soften in response to his pulls, then settle, depleted, then grow full again. My body is his: how could I not do everything in my power to keep him safe?

You and I are both imprisoned—you in that tree, me on this island. You will outlast me here. I'm sorry. The least I can do is prepare you:

The man who will come is powerful. He has less magic than I, but he has a thirst to subdue. Here is what he has more of: time and books. Here is what he has less of: skill, and the desire to know this place. He won't befriend, he will only use. There. You've been warned.

But look at the boy. How do I prepare him? Who will teach him to be a slave? Who will teach him not to be a slave? How will he chart his course through waters so strange to him? Until the

tyrant comes, he will have known only freedom. Will he learn to see himself through the eyes of others, as I did? Will he bow his head, and seek for grace? Because, spirit, that's what got me into this trouble.

Do you know why I'm here? Tell that power-twisted sorcerer when he asks: tell him I was banished from Argier—which was never my home—for mischiefs manifold and sorceries terrible to enter human hearing. He can use his imagination. Surely, you will use yours.

And tell him this, too: for one thing I did they would not take my life. It was my sin that saved my skin.

That means he was my savior, this lonely boy who will have to figure everything out for himself.

And that other boy was my savior too—who dragged me more roughly, kicked me more viciously, and avoided my eyes so much more desperately than his brutish comrades.

And as that ship sailed away, leaving me on this shore, after he gave me one last shove for show, did he gaze back, just for a moment, over the waves? Did he lean and retch into the sea, his gut answering, heave for heave, the tumult in mine? Did his eyes swim and his head spin, as he staggered back to rejoin the rest of the unruly crew, to drink the most and fight the hardest and swear the loudest, as the sea's sparkling foam tumbled about him, a diffusion of crushed diamonds, smelling like me?

Oh, spirit. It was a long journey here.

Part 1

Andalusia, circa 1510

You were safer from suspicion if you kept pigs, so my family did. When no one was paying attention, I would cross the stretch of kitchen garden, climb over the rotting boards that circumscribed the pigs' world, and sit, nestled into the mud, tolerant of the stench. I went there to be alone.

So when the boy wandered over with his flute, I didn't look at him. I was writing in the mud with a stick. I didn't know any letters, but I could draw a good imitation. Since I knew what my writing was meant to say, it didn't matter that nobody could read it. Besides, nobody else would bother to look at the mud.

Except him. He walked by twice. Then again. Then he stood in the garden and played something wheezy on his flute. Finally he ambled over as if he just happened to be enjoying the scent of pigshit. He stood there for a while, trying to look like he wasn't looking.

"Do you live here?" he asked.

"Yes. This is my house and that's my mama." I pointed at the sow, lying on her side with seven pink snouts attached to her teats and a vague expression on her face.

"Don't be mean. I meant do you live in this village."

"Everybody lives in the village. Where else would we live? Except you. You don't live here."

I waited for him to answer, but he didn't. He didn't play his flute either. I tried to look at him, but his face was turned away. I looked at my writing in the mud. I had stopped in the middle of a story, and I wanted to pick up where I had been. But I couldn't remember. And I didn't know what the letters meant.

"So? Where do you live?" I asked. I was mad at him for making me forget my story.

"I live with my papa."

"Where?"

He didn't speak.

"You probably live on that horse you were sitting on when you all came into town."

"No one lives on a horse."

"Well, you do. You must, because you don't belong here and they'll be out to feed the pigs soon and they'll take you to the priest and he'll tie you up and send you away to die and you'll never see your papa again. So you better go away."

"How do you know?"

"I know things that haven't happened yet. I know all kinds of things. I know how to make potions that make people fall down dead. I know how to make a storm come on a clear day. Look—I even know how to write."

He hoisted himself halfway over the boards to look at my letters. I could tell he was impressed.

"So you better go fast, or the priest will take you away."

He dropped from the fence, holding his flute high as though it might get spattered, and fled.



The boy and his people didn't come back for years—maybe three. By that time I was old enough to look after my sister's babies, work in the garden, help press the olives and bake the bread. I was old enough to notice my mother looking at me with the same expression of grim expectation she wore when she inspected the sheep for foot rot.

"Soon," I heard her say once, when she looked at me that way.

"Soon what?" I asked.

"Soon, Socorro, your sister Rosa will have to explain to you what happens when you grow up."

I didn't think Rosa could tell me anything I didn't know. This was what happened: If you were a girl, which everyone told me I was, you began acting silly. You spent a lot of time brushing out your hair. You stopped paying attention to your friends or sisters and began to linger around by the well or the inn. Then either you got married and your belly began to swell, or your belly began to swell and you got married. Then you moved into a crumbling hut or a well-built farm house and you kneaded bread and kept the chickens and fed the pigs and made the sausage while babies crawled at your feet or slept by the hearth or trampled your garden.

Why my mother thought any of this would happen to me, much less happen soon, I couldn't fathom. True, there was an unfamiliar tenderness about my chest, and I supposed she could see the slight swelling. But surely she knew better. I was Socorro. How could I become someone else?

≈

When the Gitanos rode into town again, he was not sitting back to back on that big horse with his cragged-faced father, looking out at where they'd been and playing half of some tune over and over on his flute, getting stuck and starting again, over and over. This time he rode by himself. I picked him out right away. I was old enough, now, to notice that I picked him out right away, and to be irritated with myself for it. I was old enough to guess at his age, which was just about the same as mine: he had left the



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small children and stood as tall as he could on the verge of something new.

He wasn't playing his flute on horseback this time, but the whole caravan stopped in the middle of the town and played their music and drank from the well before they rode off to set up their camp away in our Andalusian hills. I stood among the crowd that surrounded them and felt sure he knew I was making an effort not to watch him. The crowd saw them on their way out of the village. This suited everyone: the villagers wanted to know where they camped in order to keep watch, and the Gitanos wanted the villagers to know so they would slip away to listen to their music, purchase their goods, consult their fortune-tellers. I followed a little farther out of curiosity, then turned back before my absence was noticed.

It was the very next evening when he came looking for me. I knew he was looking for me because he went straight to the pigsty. I watched from the fork of a cork tree. It had been years since I had sat with the pigs. I was busy now, with chores. But the evening after that, I revisited my old corner.

The sty hadn't changed. The pig had another litter, and the boards had rotted in new places. It was still easy to climb over the fence. I had forgotten how the smell intensified when you made it your whole world. I rested my back against the same rough wood, and looked at the pig.

"Are you the same pig?" I asked.

The sow didn't answer. She lay just as she had the last time, on her side, feeding her personal army with the milk of mother-pig love.

"Did you hear the Gypsy music?" I asked her.

One of the piglets broke loose and squirmed up to its mama's nose. She snorted and nudged it back to its post. It latched on obediently.

I knew he had come looking for me the day before. I hoped he would come back today. I hoped he would bring his flute, because I had realized, as I scrambled back down the path with the sounds fading in the distance, that he played it very beautifully.

He did not have his flute when he came. He was holding something else. I saw him wander awkwardly by and glance casually at the enclosure where I sat. I saw his almost imperceptible start when he realized I was there. I saw him walk on just a little farther, scoping out the area to see if he was noticed, then head back, his eyes focused self-consciously on the trees behind me.

I almost said, "You sure like this pigpen, don't you?" I almost said, "Would you play your flute for me?" I thought of saying, "Hello, Gypsy." I thought of saying, "Who do you think you are and what do you want from me?"

I just looked at him. I must have looked like an unwashed fool, sitting in the mud.

He just looked at me.

Finally, he said, "I remembered that you knew your letters. So I thought you might like this." And he reached across the buckled gray planks to hand me something soft, and fragile. It was a book.

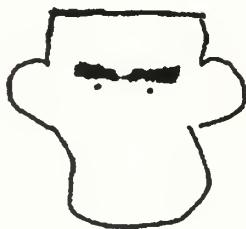
I had seen books before. My mother had secret books, with a different kind of writing, that she kept hidden and took out every once in a while for special days. She never explained what they meant. And the priest had books. My cousin Josefina cleaned his rooms and once she had brought me one to look at. But I had never had the chance to hold a book for as long as I liked, to turn the pages, study it. It made my hands tingle.

I held it carefully away from the mire and opened it. Its colors lit up the dusk. It had pictures of saints with cloaks and haloes and people gathering sheaves in fields, pictures of the baby Jesus, gazing unruffled at the world from his mother's lap, and pictures of people eating and drinking. Blue and gold birds draped their tail feathers over vines twisting intricately in leafy margins. And it had letters. Letters and letters.

I must have pored over it for a long time, because when I looked up at the boy, he had gone away. □

LISE BRODY is a longtime high-school teacher, writer, choreographer, translator, and single parent living in Massachusetts. This novel-in-process grew from a monologue she wrote for Dances About Witches, a dance/performance piece she created with her company, Round the Corner Movers (www.roundthecornermovers.org).

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NORMAN AND ELIZABETH MAILER IN PROVINCETOWN, 2000 PHOTO BY FRANK J. NASTASI

Keynote Speech from the Tenth Annual International Conference of the Norman Mailer Society, October 2012

By Elizabeth Mailer

In October 2012, I attended the annual conference of the Norman Mailer Society in Provincetown, Massachusetts. The NMS is dedicated to preserving the memory and legacy of my father, Norman Mailer. At the conference, the many rich and fascinating panels, discussions, and presentations evoked my father's ideas, politics, spirituality, sensibility, and essence. Throughout the weekend, I felt my father's presence in a distinct and powerful way, and I know that he was alive to all of us who were present at this event. I had the honor and privilege to speak at the conference and to read the following excerpt from my memoir in progress, Walking Through the Fire.

This excerpt takes place in my father's Provincetown home in May of 2005. At that time, Dad was in very poor health, and he expressed an urgency not only to see me but also to see my work. This was a very long time coming. He knew that I was in the middle of writing a novel, and I knew this trip to Provincetown would be the last chance I'd have to show him my book.

So did you bring me the whole thing?" my father asked. We were in the dining room of his Provincetown home—the big red brick house with the climbing ivy and the white picket fence in the quiet East End of town. Dad sat at his customary place at the head of the long glass-top table and I sat in the chair to his right. "What?" I said. I knew exactly what he was asking, but I didn't want to answer him.

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"Did you bring me the whole manuscript?" he asked again. I paused.

"No, Dad, I brought you the first two hundred pages."

"Why not the whole thing?"

"Well . . ." I sighed. "I've actually written eight hundred pages."

"Good God! Eight hundred pages?" he said.

"Yes . . . but . . . I've sort of written myself into circles. I'm . . . lost. I don't know where I'm going with the plot," I confessed.

I had not planned on telling him any of that, but it just slipped out.

"Betsy, I'm gonna be extra tough on you today!" he said. His tone stirred up my anxiety. "Listen to me," he continued. "I don't give a damn if you wrote eight hundred or eight thousand pages. Time is your enemy! Finish the book or it'll drag on like this forever."

"You're right, Dad. I'll aim to give you a finished manuscript in six months." I gazed out the big bay window at the view of the lighthouse across the water.

He sighed loudly, rubbed his forehead with his hands, and leaned his elbows on the table.

"Listen, darling," he said, and his voice softened. "You're a boss lady and I love ya . . . but you're just not hearing me. My eyes are goin' fast, I may be in very bad shape after the heart surgery, and I really don't think I have much longer. So if you want me to read your whole book, then STOP STALLING AND FINISH THE FUCKER!"

I burst into tears. This caught us both by surprise. After all, we had come a long way: I was forty-five and he was eighty-two; I was more mature and he was more patient; he was no longer that brute and I was no longer that insecure teenager. But somehow, being here with him now, with so much at stake, I felt like I was fifteen years old all over again.

"C'mere, Bets," Dad said.

He had mellowed so much in recent years, and just when he was becoming more of the daddy I always wanted, soon I'd be losing him. Soon . . . I'd . . . lose . . . him. This was just starting to sink in. All these years, had I wanted him to be my mentor? Or had I just wanted him to be a better father? At last, I was reaching out to him as father and mentor. I had waited twenty-two years to show him my work. But what if I had waited too long? What if it was now too late?

I got up from my chair and stood by him. His joints were stiff as he raised his arms and reached up to me like a small child. I bent down and wrapped my arms around his shoulders. His upper back felt brittle. It took all his strength to hug me tightly, but he held me in that moment with everything he had.

I sat back down in my chair.

"Dad," I said, my voice quaking. "Do you think you'll like my writing?"

"I don't know," he mumbled. I could tell my question irritated him. "My guess is . . . it'll be pretty good," he answered.

"But Daa-ad," I whined. "Pretty good means mediocre! My writing should be better than that!"

"Bullshit!" he roared. He struck the table with the flat of his hand, just the way his father, Barney, often did. "And as a writer, where the hell do you think I place myself on that scale?" he asked.

"Genius?" I suggested.

"Hell, no!" his voice boomed with indignation. "As a writer, I place myself two notches above pretty good!"

"I don't believe you!" I said, crossing my arms like a petulant child.

"I don't care if you don't believe me! You can go fuck yourself!" He grinned. "Look, Betsy, this is my point: Stop caring about what other people think or it will consume you. I've had to learn this the hard way. Some people will hate your writing; some people will like it. Fuck 'em! It doesn't matter. You have no control over what they think. You must develop a tougher skin or you won't survive as a writer. When you write, don't be invested in the result. Get your ego out of the way. Step aside. Make room for a Collaboration between your unconscious and the Cosmos." When he said "Collaboration" and "Cosmos," I could hear the capital letters in his voice.

He leaned over and struggled with his left boot.

"Honey, these boots are bothering me," he said. "Would you help me take them off?"

As always, he was wearing his navy-blue, suede, fur-lined Uggs. He wore them every day and in every season.

"Sure thing," I said.

I pulled off his left boot and then his right. Then he settled back into his chair, took a bite of his Dove ice-cream bar, and set it down on the small dish in front of him.

"OK, where was I?" he asked.

"Um . . . you were talking about a 'Collaboration,'" I reminded him.

"Yes, yes . . ." Dad said. He picked up his napkin and brushed off a bit of chocolate that had dropped on the front of his navy-blue fleece vest, the one with the zipper.

"Writing is an act of service, maybe to God, maybe to the Devil; one doesn't always know. Good writing will come out of the drive and discipline of doing it every day. It's damn hard work. *But the writing must come first, before everyone and everything else,*" he said.

Yes, that was true for him. But he had paid a price for that. Would I ever put my writing first, before everyone and everything else? If so, at what price and at whose expense?

My father removed his earphones and set them on the table. They were smooth, pink, and cashew-shaped. As he popped them back into each ear, they made a high-pitched whistling sound.

"Imagine you're at home and your house suddenly catches on fire and it's burning down to the ground," Dad said. "And in a life-and-death moment, you have to decide between rescuing your spouse or saving your manuscript. Which do you choose?"

"Dad, isn't the answer obvious?"

"You save your manuscript!" he shouted.

"You're kidding, right?"

"I'm dead serious," he said. "That's how driven and selfish and devoted you must be to your work."

I laughed out loud, and yet I did get the point.

"Listen, honey, I'm wiped out. I'm going upstairs to my office to take a little nap. Why don't you bring me your manuscript around 3:00. I'll be ready to read it at that time."

Dad began his slow ascent up the two narrow flights to his writing studio in the attic. From where I sat in the dining room, I could not see him, but I could hear his labored breathing as he climbed the stairs off the den, and the dull, rhythmic "thud" of first his canes and then his feet upon each carpeted step.

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Around 3:00, as planned, I went upstairs to the attic. I walked past the banister on my left and the fax machine on my right, the hardly used stationary bike and the weight machines collecting dust, the single bed in one corner and the many shelves crammed full of books on every subject. Dad's office space was just past the bookshelves. That marvelous late-afternoon Cape Cod light streamed in from the big bay window beyond his work space, and my father's form was in silhouette as he sat at his desk with his back to me.

As I approached him, I glanced out the window. I could see the sandbars at low tide, the many old cottages and condos along the beach, and the two-mile arc-shaped shoreline that ran all the way from the East End to the West End of town. There was nothing on Dad's desk except for a small stack of index cards, a couple of sharpened, yellow number-two lead pencils, and a copy of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*. He was doing research for his last novel, *The Castle in the Forest*.

"Dad," I said, softly tapping him on the shoulder. "Here are my pages."

"Terrific!" he said. "I'll start reading right now, but, since my eyes are bad, it may take hours."

"That's OK," I said.

"Now let's have a look." He sounded like a doctor examining a patient.

He took the pages and placed them in front of him on the desk.

"OK, Dad, I'll see you later," I chirped anxiously.

He turned his attention to page 1 of the text, but I wasn't ready to let go of my baby. I hid behind a bookshelf to the right of Dad's desk to observe him surreptitiously. I must have looked like a teenage groupie, spying on Justin Bieber.

My father picked up his pencil, with its nub of pink eraser on one end. He was a visceral reader and a noisy editor. As he read, I watched him mouth the words in a way that was audible to his own ear. I once asked him about this, and he said he purposely read this way so that he could hear the rhythm of the words. He was like a cardiologist with a stethoscope, discerning the beats in a sentence: he listened for the skip, crack, or click of the writer's voice on the page, in much the same way that a technician scanned the blips of a heartbeat on an EKG. Dad could hear when the words flowed freely on the page, like

blood flowing through the chamber of the heart, and, conversely, he knew where the words were blocked, stuck, or inert like a blood clot—"dead-ass" as he put it. As he sat there reading my pages, sometimes his lips formed an "O" and he made a soft, whistling sound; a soft whoosh of air moved in and out of his puckered lips, as if releasing pressure from a valve.

From where I stood, I could observe the jerky movements of his hand as he crossed out words, bracketed words, or made notes in the margins. The lead of his pencil made little tapping or scratching noises like Morse code as it moved across the page. He was so deeply focused, a train could have passed through the attic without his even taking notice. As he read my pages, I tried to read his face: the hint of a smile at one moment, the suggestion of a frown the next. I wanted desperately to learn of the verdict in advance: did he like my book or did he hate it?

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After spying on Dad for an hour, I crept down the stairs from the attic to the second floor. I paced back and forth outside the guest room. I studied the family photos on the little table in the foyer. I tried to read a copy of *People* magazine but could not concentrate on anything. I tiptoed back upstairs to Dad's office to check on his progress. He was napping on the little bed in the corner. Oh, shit, my book must have put him to sleep! Oh, God, that's awful! I grabbed a sweater and ran out of the house. I took a speed-walk down Commercial Street to quiet my demons. Just past Cook Street, I popped into a little grocery store called Angel Foods to buy a chocolate bar.

When I returned to the house, Dad called me upstairs. It was about a half hour before dinner.

"So... there's some bad news and there's some good news," he said. "The bad news is: your book needs editing. So tomorrow, we'll sit down and I'll go over all the pages with you."

My face fell and he fully noted my expression.

Then he said: "And the good news is..." His voice trailed off and he paused to milk the full drama of the moment. He said it again: "The good news is... I love it!"

"What!?" I squeaked.

"I love your book!" he declared.

For the second time that day, I burst into tears. . . . Euphoria.

Then he said something I never imagined I'd hear. "Well, darling." He smiled. "It looks like we have another writer in the family!" ▀

ELIZABETH MAILER is a writer who lives in New York City with her husband, Frank, their daughter, Christina, and their cat, Glory. She is currently writing her memoir, Walking Through the Fire. She is also working on a novel, Scorpio Rising, and a nonfiction book of vignettes and photos called The Facebook Chronicles.



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BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

The Fellowship Experience at the **Norman Mailer Writers Colony** in Provincetown

By Denise Doherty Pappas

WHEN YOU STAND on the cement doorstep of the giant red-brick house in Provincetown, Norman Mailer's former home and now the Norman Mailer Center, you can't help but feel a sense of awe as you prepare to enter what can only be described as a "literary kingdom." Each summer since 2009, writing mentors have read hundreds of applications and selected fifteen fellows as advisees for the Norman Mailer Writers Colony experience. Five fellows work on fiction, five on nonfiction, and five on poetry during a stay of several weeks. In addition, tuition-free seminars have been granted to promising writers in genres from biography to creative nonfiction.

In 2011, I joined the ranks of these Mailer fellows and seminarians and entered not just the former home of a fabled Pulitzer Prize-winning writer, but also a historic and hallowed writing environment. The Mailer living room overlooking Cape Cod Bay, the site of many parties that included local artists as well as distinguished glitterati, now housed four boardroom tables and a clean whiteboard, ready for assignments I'd receive with five fellow biographers. Our teacher, Deborah Martinson, Professor and Chair of the Writing and Rhetoric Department at Occidental College, knew Mailer chapter and verse. She first met Norman Mailer while researching her 2005 biography *Lillian Hellman: A Life with Foxes and Scoundrels* and admired the chutzpa and fine craftsmanship Mailer and Hellman share.

In the days that followed, Martinson challenged us to craft “personal ads” for our biographical subjects, then detail, map, set in context, embellish, and outline our biographies. She advised us on book proposals, publications, and promotions.

Describing our time at the Mailer Center, Deborah said: “The very air, the wallpaper, the deck, the bar overlooking the water—all urge us to do our best in the presence of a grand master of nonfiction. Every single seminarian comes away with something good and tangible—the courage and intent to write and write well.”

When house manager Guy Wolf gave us a tour of the holy of holies, Norman Mailer’s famous third-floor study, we behaved like kids in a literary candy store—eagerly posing next to Norman’s desk, his bookcase, his bed. We were genuinely respectful, however, of the professional self-discipline that P-town’s most famous author had mastered in creating his many books. After studying his habits, exploring his house, and sharing Norman stories, each of us felt fortunate to have experienced this time in his home. Biographer-filmmaker Kylie Boltin explains: “One feels part of its grand literary history, with the Mailers a vital presence. One feels their warmth and care for the next generation of writers.”

J. Michael Lennon, official biographer and friend of Mailer, a member of the board of directors at the Center, and author of *Norman Mailer: A Double Life*, which will be published by Simon & Schuster this November, cites the visit to Norman’s office as THE keystone Colony experience. In the garret workshop, Lennon points out, “There are no prizes, no pictures with celebrities on the walls. You see the old dictionary with pages clawed out, bindings gone. You see an old purple satin curtain used to block sunshine from a cluttered writing desk. A fax machine, thousands of bulging cream files, remind you writing is serious business. Scars on the table, grooves in the floor, the ‘Bellevue’ sign give us a profound visceral sense of the intimate work life of a great writer.” One exits Mailer’s work space realizing



(ABOVE) DIANE HINTON PERRY (LEFT), BETTE SKANDALIS (MIDDLE), MICHAEL HASTINGS (RIGHT)
(OPPOSITE) FRONT ENTRANCE TO THE MAILER HOUSE AT 627 COMMERCIAL STREET IN PROVINCETOWN

the continuing struggle, the life commitment, that real writing demands.

Compared to Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony and their one-hundred-plus-year histories, the five-year-old Mailer Writing Center is a new kid on the block. While the Fine Arts Work Center includes visual artists, the Mailer Center devotes itself exclusively to writers with its mission “to nurture future generations of writers in honor of Mailer’s contribution to American culture and letters.” It’s a research and development workshop, providing room and board to cultural critics who, like Mailer, work in various genres and have traveled the world but need respite in Provincetown to write.

The idea for the Colony started in 2007 during Mailer’s final days at Mount Sinai Hospital, when his longtime friend, Lawrence Schiller, spoke to

Norman about his legacy. The two writers had become friends in 1972 when they collaborated on the photojournalism biography *Marilyn* and bonded over Brooklyn, beauties, boxing, and books. Years later, working on *The Executioner’s Song*, the two strong-willed colleagues had a falling out that lasted for months. Norman eventually broke the silence with a fax to Schiller that read: “If I knew I’d have to kiss your ass, I wouldn’t have shaved.” “Hello, lover,” was Larry’s reply.

Larry Schiller gives Mailer full credit for making him a better person: “He brought to my table the wisdom learned by being run over by many trucks in his life.” With Norman and Norris Church Mailer’s approval, Larry vowed to remember Norman’s mentoring by giving the author a second life via a writers colony.

Mike Lennon, who edited *The Spooky Art: Thoughts on Writing*, Mailer’s instructive letter to future writers, reflects on how much Norman would have loved the center that Schiller created. Countless times, Lennon remembers, Norman gave personal, practical advice to writers; he read their manuscripts, introduced them to agents, blurbéd their works. He guided authors of all stripes through the challenges and pressures of writing. He warned of letdowns and failures. He explained how to handle revisions and reviews. Most of all, Lennon contends, beyond craft instructions, Norman understood and shared his insights on the psychology of the writer’s life. Mailer foresaw and foretold what an author would face professionally and personally, pre- and post-publication. “Yes,” Lennon enthuses, “Norman would be extremely happy to see people in his living room getting great advice.”

In 2009, Schiller leased the Mailer home at 627 Commercial Street, and the Norman Mailer Writing Center was born. The Colony’s arrival provided solace to hometown son and



DR. DEBORAH MARTINSON (SECOND FROM THE LEFT IN BLUE SHIRT), BIOGRAPHY SEMINAR LEADER, RELAXES WITH BIOGRAPHERS ON THE MAILER HOUSE DECK.



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THE WATCH AT PEAKED HILL: 1953–2003

BY JOSEPHINE BREEN DEL DEO

The Watch at Peaked Hill is an account of life on the dunes as experienced by Josephine and Salvatore Del Deo over a half century, beginning with the time they spent their honeymoon summer in a shack owned by "Frenchie" Chanel. With vivid portraits of the colorful figures who participated in the "dune culture," such as Charlie Schmid and Provincetown poet Harry Kemp, Josephine Del Deo's history combines an entertaining story of dune life with the vital concerns of conservation advocacy on the Lower Cape, including a firsthand account of the creation of the National Seashore. With illustrations that include color paintings by Salvatore Del Deo, as well as rare photographs of dune shacks, this is an invaluable chronicle of a unique chapter in Cape Cod's history and a way of life in danger of disappearing forever.

Provincetown Arts editor Chris Busa. His 1987 article "This Is a Town Worth Digging In and Fighting For" discusses Mailer's influence and how Busa "took comfort in walking by the house and seeing the light burning in the window of the attic, knowing he was working." Through the new Colony, the lights would remain on, illuminating a variety of authors eager to follow Mailer's path.

Paying for those lights is a Herculean task. Establishing and operating a new colony in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis was a formidable assignment. But Larry Schiller tackles challenges with remarkable energy and expertise. The Brooklyn-born author, bicoastal film producer, director, screenwriter, photojournalist, and Emmy Award-winner is no jack-of-all-trades. Rather, he is the master of each, a visionary, big-picture guy. "Failure is not in my dictionary" is Larry's motto. Armed with a killer rolodex, he is the consummate salesman.

"The Center is Larry's immortality project," Mike Lennon observes. "Larry works 24/7. No grass grows under his organizational feet. He is fearless in asking for help, finding resources, and keeping the literary community involved. His perseverance is unreal. He goes around problems with astounding creativity." Greg Curtis, Colony mentor and author of *Disarmed: The Story of the Venus de Milo*, concurs: "No Larry, no Center. It's that simple."

Who besides Mr. Schiller could enlist Keith Richards, Bill Clinton, and Muhammad Ali to pitch for the Center? The gala fund-raisers Schiller produces each October in New York City are jaw-dropping literary affairs. Event Cochair Tina Brown reminds us of the importance of nurturing new writing talent. Gay and Nan Talese, Annie Leibovitz, Salman Rushdie, Francine Prose, Tom Wolfe, Jan Werner, Doris Kearns Goodwin, and Oliver Stone have all shown up to champion the Mailer Center.

Schiller intends to introduce Mailer to the next generation of readers and to keep Mailer read from coast to coast. He collaborates with the National Council of Teachers of English, assigning scholarships to worthy high-school, junior-college, and college students. "Final Cascade," the first award-winning entry by a college student, was published in the magazine *Creative Nonfiction*. Its author, John C. Gilmore, e-mailed his continued appreciation to Larry this way: "Because of all the hard work you do, the hard work I do is likely to be published and reach an audience. It's thrilling. Do know I am working hard." Just as Norman was parochial in helping all writers, Schiller, too, awards prizes to talented beginners as well as established authors. It's inspiring to see teenage writers share center stage with Mailer Lifetime Achievement honorees Toni Morrison, Orhan Pamuk, Elie Wiesel, and Joyce Carol Oates.

Starlight shines on everyone at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel benefits. Dawn Gilchrist-Young, 2011 Winner of the Mailer High School Teacher Award, tells me, "I was treated like a queen, like a dignitary, like someone worth the time and money the Mailer Center was investing in me." Of her fellowship in P-town she says this: "I loved

every moment. The beauty of Provincetown astonished and moved me every day. The community opened their lives up without reservation to a Southern stranger whose work at home is that of a low-status, high-school English teacher. I will be overwhelmed with gratitude at their graciousness for the rest of my days."

The 2012 Teacher of the Year claimed her award with her winning piece "Why Women Moan in Bed." Kay McSpadden summarizes the Center's level of care: "I was treated like a celebrity, given a handler for the entire evening." Garrison Keillor was her prize presenter. A longtime fan, Kay was thrilled when *A Prairie Home Companion*'s host confessed himself a reluctant reader of fiction: "But he told me my story pulled him to the end."

Both private and corporate sponsorships and all fund-raiser profits finance the Writing Center. Last December, in the *Huffington Post*, Fellow Tom Ward described the boost of confidence this scholarship carries, "letting you know that during all those years of writing alone in your bedroom, you were doing something right." Blogs written in-house reflect the "pinch me, I'm here" feeling of being present in the house of a master. "Yesterday I sat in Norman Mailer's recliner while I edited my novel," fiction fellow Grant Jones wrote in 2012. "To a recliner one ass is as good as another." Fellow T. A. Elam, an Atlanta poet, strikes a more reverent tone in "Walking in Provincetown": "here good morning is a prayer / a kiss on both cheeks baptism."

In addition, Schiller arranges for surprise guests to pop in at the Colony. No matter how successful or sophisticated the fellows might be, it is impressive when icons such as Don DeLillo and Paul Theroux stop by for a little shoptalk. No wonder one Colony blogger wrote: "I pray there is no Heaven. This is enough. More than enough."

Cross-fertilization of writers is the program's highlight. English Professor Robert M. Dowling, author of Yale University Press's 2014 *Journey into Night: The Rise and Fall of Eugene O'Neill in 4 Acts*, treasures his fellowship. "I don't believe I have ever experienced such a stimulating and mutually beneficial environment," Dowling writes. "In a culture that does shamefully little to promote the value of literature, it's remarkable to me that such a resource still exists in the United States." Greg Curtis describes Mailer fellows as "talented, hardworking, and very generous in helping their comrades." Kylie Bolton notes that "size matters. The one-on-one with mentors is invaluable. Advice is tailored to one's specific genre issues. Peers get to know one another's work and happily share craft techniques. Individual apartments provide the space and the quiet needed to create. Fellows depart with their customized piece of the town."

Deborah Martinson reports the full-circle nature of this tribe. One of her former Mailer seminarians is now the chief editor of Martinson's upcoming biography, *Virginia Durr: Southern Radical Come Hell or Highwater*. "Who else gets this lucky?" Deborah says. "For the sense of being a part of something larger. For friendships. For networks. For life."

In Mailer's house, journalists confer with lawyer-writers, novices learn from old pros. Over drinks, they schmooze on the waterfront porch, where Chris Busa once described Mailer pacing: "Like Ahab, he did some of his best thinking while thumping on the foredeck." Schiller says the program is meant to foster work "that is as unique and different as Norman was—work on the edge."

"With the pride of the artist," Mailer once wrote, "you must blow against the walls of every power that exists the small trumpet of your defiance." Colony fellow Michael Hastings heard Mailer loud and clear. In June of 2010, armed with advice from journalist fellows he'd met in Provincetown, Hastings wrote "The Runaway General" for *Rolling Stone* magazine. The then-thirty-year-old author reported General Stanley McChrystal and his staff expressing criticism of and contempt for the White House. Unamused, President Obama called McChrystal to Washington, where the general resigned. McChrystal has since taken full responsibility for the article, and the *Huffington Post* gave Michael Hastings its Game Changer award that year.

Many great writers have been lost to history because they lacked backers with the talent to move them forward. More than ever before, Schiller reasons, it's critical to keep Mailer alive on the national stage. Beginning this summer, the Mailer Colony will go "on the road." Each year, the fellowship program will be held in a place where Norman Mailer researched or began writing one of his books. First stop will be 142 Columbia Heights in Brooklyn. Here, in

Mailer's New York home base, fifteen new fellows will read, write, and reflect on their ongoing projects, starting July 21. They will be inspired by the environment where Mailer spent fifty years of his life. Thanks to the generosity of the Mailer family, a new audience will be invited to readings and lectures surrounded by Mr. Mailer's extensive library. Mike Lennon thinks this travel plan is a "brilliant idea since Mailer is associated with so many places in America." A walking tour of Brooklyn is being built into the summer fellowship, featuring Mailer's parents' home and the nearby former residence of Truman Capote.

In following years, Larry Schiller proposes, fellows will continue in Mailer's footsteps. They will study in Utah, where Norman researched *The Executioner's Song*. Writers will convene in Palm Springs, California, where he researched *The Deer Park*. They will travel to Miami, where Mailer began writing *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*. New venues, new inspiration. New audiences, new conversations. New books and, yes, new buzz. All to honor the prolific author who warned us in *The Deer Park*: "There was that law of life so cruel and yet so just that one must grow or else pay more to remain the same." □

DENISE DOHERTY PAPPAS is a summer resident of Provincetown and former Mailer Center seminarian. Her biography of John Simmons, *The Measure of a Man*, describes the life of this nineteenth-century clothing manufacturer and philanthropist, who endowed Simmons College in Boston.

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From WELLFLEET COP to *THE NEW YORKER*

An Interview with Alec Wilkinson

By Raymond Elman

AS WITH SEVERAL people I have interviewed for *Provincetown Arts*, I first met Alec Wilkinson on a tennis court in the early 1970s. Alec was still a college student, I was in my late twenties. When Alec spent the winter in Wellfleet in 1973, he also spent time with me and the young family I had invited to live in my Mayflower Heights house (my girlfriend and her three preteens). Alec came by frequently for dinner—memorably joining us ice-skating on the Beech Forest Pond in the Province Lands—and we attended his local music gigs. In those days, Alec was a rock-and-roll musician trying to sound as if he hadn't grown up among the upper-middle class.

One day Alec told me he was going to become a writer, and I never heard him play another note on his guitar. He took all the discipline he had developed to be a musician and used it to write every day. Much to my surprise, he became a *New Yorker* staff writer by 1980. Now he is the author of ten books: *Midnights* (1982); *Moonshine* (1985); *Big Sugar* (1989); *The Riverkeeper* (1991); *A Violent Act* (1993); *My Mentor* (2002); *Mr. Apology* (2003); *The Happiest Man in the World* (2007), about Poppa Neutrino, the only man to cross the Atlantic in a raft made of found materials; and *The Protest Singer: An Intimate Portrait of Pete Seeger* (2009). His most recent book is *The Ice Balloon* (2012), an account of the Swedish visionary aeronaut S. A. Andrée's attempt, in 1897, to reach the North Pole in a hydrogen balloon.

RAY ELMAN: You grew up in Westchester County, just north of New York City, right?

ALEC WILKINSON: I grew up in Mount Kisco, New York, which is five miles from the house I own now. I mainly live in New York City, though, on the Upper West Side.

RE: When did you first come to the Outer Cape?

AW: In 1946 my parents rented a cottage at Corn Hill in Truro, invited by Jack Kahn, who wrote for more than fifty years at *The New Yorker* as E. J. Kahn, Jr. My father knew Jack from commuting by train to Manhattan. My parents built their house in Wellfleet in 1952, the year I was born.

In those days, getting to Wellfleet from New York involved traveling a patchwork of strange roads. I slept during most of the trip, but occasionally would raise my head to the window and see housetops or statues in town squares, like figures in a dream, and fall back asleep. Providence was a maze of tenements and gas stations.

RE: Your parents' house was a Modernist house?

AW: It was a Chermayeff house. It may have been the first Chermayeff house in the Wellfleet woods. There's another one very much like it, a little smaller, not far from Chermayeff's own house on Slough Pond, the one that has a room in the shape of a cube.

RE: Didn't you know Jack Kahn's three sons when you were growing up?

AW: Yes, they were the first surfers I knew, and accomplished tennis players. Tim Dickey, Tony

Kahn, and I had a rock 'n' roll band when we were in eighth grade. We played dances at the Chequessett Yacht Club, and Tim's mother would drive us to the gigs. I would arrive August 1, pining for whatever girlfriend I'd left in New York. I didn't enjoy being on the Cape much then, feeling in exile from my actual life.

RE: When you were on the Cape in the fifties, did you know Brooke Newman, too? She was another Truro summer resident from birth.

AW: I didn't meet Brooke until the summer of 1976. But my father bought James Newman's Aston Martin.

RE: Amazing. That car is legendary. Do you remember the car very well?

AW: Oh, hell, yeah! Can you imagine driving an Aston Martin when you're seventeen years old? In Brooke's memoir I read about her father's love for sports cars, so I learned the lineage of this piece of rolling stock that had been part of the material centerpiece of my adolescence.

RE: As I recall, you were a classical mandolin player when we first met.

AW: No, I was really a guitar player. I could also play mandolin, but I was always a rock 'n' roll musician and a bluegrass musician by affection. I learned a lot from Tim Dickey, who could already play nearly the entire Beatles catalogue. I became very obsessive about guitar once I was in college. I would practice four hours a day and play at night when I could.

RE: What did training as a musician teach you about writing?

AW: I knew how to sit in one place for four hours, so attention was not a problem. One of my older brothers, Leland, who has a house in Truro, was a very accomplished classical pianist. He would walk through the front door after school and drop his books and sit down by the piano and not get up until dinnertime. When I decided to apply myself to music, I had a model to emulate.

RE: What prompted you to go to Bennington?

AW: I didn't plan college very carefully. My three brothers have a number of degrees, from Harvard and Yale among them, although one of them went to RISD first. I was given a Harvard beach towel when I was seven or eight, and a Harvard sweatshirt—which, for some reason, was black, with a white emblem, as if it had been made in Korea, like those knockoffs you see sometimes in Chinatown that say "University of Harvard." It was plain that Harvard was the destiny my parents intended for me, and I resolved to thwart them. I got into an argument with the alumni who interviewed me in New York, and I got into an argument at my interview in Cambridge, which my brother Leland walked me over to, since it took place during his graduation. I think it must have been his graduate-school graduation, because I remember sitting on the steps of the library during the ceremony and seeing Joey Kahn, in his robes, with blond hair flowing over his shoulders, looking like a figure from a French



RAY ELMAN, PAMET RIVER VALLEY #2, 2008, OIL AND DIGITAL COLLAGE ON CANVAS, 40 BY 60 INCHES

romance. Joe and my brother are separated by a few years.

I didn't have the grades to go to Harvard anyway, or the test scores. I don't know if I was even college material. I had no interest in going to school anymore, and I didn't connect it to a future. I didn't think, as kids apparently have to do now, "What do I want to be when I grow up and how am I going to prepare for it?"

RE: At what point did you decide to pursue writing?

AW: I spent my first year out of college as a policeman in Wellfleet—going into people's houses when they were fighting and having to separate them, going to the cottage of the young woman who'd hung herself on Christmas Eve. Having unusual experiences for someone like me. Most young writers are stuck with their families as material. Not much has happened to them, except in their minds, so they exaggerate the behaviors of their fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters and uncles and aunts, because they haven't yet developed an objectivity about them. But I was finding myself in a circumstance where I was surrounded by exotic people—the eight other policemen who couldn't have been more different from me, a few of whom had been to war already. I was collecting material. I would tell my friends

the things that were happening to me, and some of them began to say, "You should write a book."

RE: So you did not become a policeman to write a book.

AW: I took the job because I'd never had a job. And because I had grown up in a family of three brothers who are sufficiently older than me that I hadn't felt I had a place among them. My brothers left me with a belief that they knew mysteries I didn't and weren't willing to share them. I thought that if I put myself in the company of men who knew those mysteries, and maybe even ones my brothers didn't, that I would be enlarged. Some of the cops were glamorous figures for me, men who appeared to be unintimidated by life, "wise guys" who held themselves with a physical confidence I hadn't a shred of.

I also had to find a way to make a living, since it didn't seem possible to make one as a musician. I had a fear of still playing in bands in ski bars when I was thirty. In those days, it wasn't like it is now, where you can go into your bedroom and record yourself and use Pro Tools to make it sound like it had been done in a studio, and then put out a CD. You had to be signed by Atlantic Records or Capitol Records or Warner Brothers. There were the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, the Grateful Dead, Simon & Garfunkel. I just thought, where am I

ever going to find a place among all that? How would I even begin? So I decided I was going to give up music. I thought, "I'll go to law school." It seemed to make a kind of cynical sense that I would sit for my law-school interview and say, "I have a passion for the law, which was nurtured during my experience enforcing it." None of it true, but it was handy.

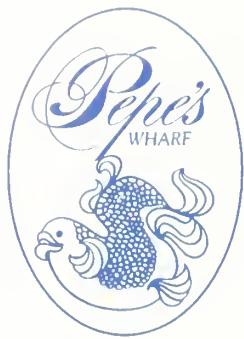
But very quickly I tired of the lawyer's life as I experienced it—speeding tickets and drunken-driving arrests. It didn't occur to me that there was the law of the sea, corporate law, environmental law, specialty practices of many kinds. Or that one could feel passionate about the law and enjoy serving it in any form. Quickly, I gave up that ambition. I became persuaded that I was going to write a book and become rich. I thought writers were rich, from seeing the writers around the Cape. After getting rich, I was going to be a musician again.

RE: You suffer from my disease: optimism.

AW: It didn't occur to me that the writers on the Outer Cape were very successful writers. I just thought, "Well, those are writers." I saw the trade from the wrong end of the telescope.

RE: Were you a big reader?

AW: I listened to music more than I read. And



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I read promiscuously, without any deep feeling or appreciation for what a good writer was really getting at. I knew I had to stay a year as a policeman in order to give shape to the book. When I first started, anything I read would influence what I was writing. If I was reading Faulkner, I would write for two weeks like Faulkner. If I happened to pick up a book by Hunter Thompson, I'd start writing like Hunter Thompson. I was very impressionable.

It wasn't working out so I gave up and went to Ireland with John Van Kirk, the son of Joan Colebrook. He was going to Ireland to seek out Irish musicians, and he said I could come with him. We left in August. John went home in September, but I stayed, mostly in London, and did various things, among them working as an accompanist at the Martha Graham dance school. I went home at Thanksgiving, having resolved to try to write this book again. I was going to collect what I needed and move to Paris and write in cafés, the way Hemingway did. I even had a beret, but I never moved to Paris. My piece of good fortune was my father saying to William Maxwell, his friend, "Alec's working on a book. Would you read it?"

RE: What was Maxwell's response?

AW: I think he could tell that I was trying to do something seriously. I don't know whether he thought I was talented, but he knew that when he told me to do something, I didn't repeat the mistake, so he didn't feel like he was wasting his time. I was certainly in a much rawer state as a writer than any of the other people Maxwell had worked with—Cheever, Updike, Nabokov, Salinger, Eudora Welty, Frank O'Connor.

RE: That's an understatement. You must have felt honored to have his attention. What was the process? Did he mark up your manuscript?

AW: Extravagantly at first. I'd write for two weeks and bring it to him. Each encounter usually involved a different set of problems. Things seemed funnier to me than they perhaps were, or more interesting. I made the mistake writers sometimes make of being in love with their material. And there was the problem of my prose, at the beginning, being so imitative of other authors. It was an unusual situation, not reproducible really. A man with the patience of the nineteenth century willing to help a younger man learn his trade. So my education as a writer was different from that of any other writer I'm aware of.

RE: Who suggested the Edward Hopper cover for your first book?

AW: I did. I had always assumed that the gas station in the famous Hopper painting was the Sinclair station in Wellfleet, no longer there. Random House had the idea of a cover with handcuffs on it, and I thought, "I better have an idea quickly."

RE: How did Random House become your publisher?

AW: I finished my book and I was living in Truro, and, thanks to you, I think, I got a job at

the Provincetown Art Association and Museum. A friend of my parents who worked at the *Times* took my manuscript to his publisher, and she wrote him, "I cannot encourage this young man enough to abandon this project." I had an unsupportable conviction, though, that my subject was fascinating—that an upper-middle-class white kid going to a little town in America and being a cop was compelling. I thought of the rejection letter, "Shows what you know." So I continued to send out my book and have it come back promptly, a little shopworn. I even sent it to John McPhee, who sent it back with a generous letter—generous in spirit, that is. He said, "As a writer, you need to know editors and agents, not other writers." Jim Gilbert wrote a piece about me in the *Provincetown Advocate*. The piece appeared around Thanksgiving, and a publisher from New York was visiting Wellfleet and read it. He wrote me and said, "Why don't you send me the book?" I did and he kept it for five months, then rejected it.

RE: Do you remember who that was?

AW: James Silberman. He published Bruce Chatwin, whom I admire extravagantly. Anyway, he turned it down. I decided that if I was really going to be a writer, I had to move to New York. A writer named George W. S. Trow rented John Van Kirk's house, and John said, "You have to meet my tenant. He's really funny." And so I met George, who at that point had worked for *The New Yorker* for about fifteen years. He was writing a piece that summer that made him famous, which was his profile of Ahmet Ertegun, later published in his book *Within the Context of No Context*. He'd written dozens of stories for *Talk of the Town*, and sort of reinvented the form. He was immensely resourceful. He rented John's house for May and June, and he went back to New York for a few days in 1977, which happened to be the night of the great blackout. He was having dinner with Diana Vreeland at his loft, and had driven her home with all the lights out through the city, and people directing traffic at the intersections with flashlights, and he wrote about it. I had a subscription to *The New Yorker*, and a few weeks later it arrived, with an anonymous Talk piece (as they were in those days), but clearly written by George; that is, I recognized something of the rhythms of his speech in the piece. So I'd met a writer, and I saw the work. I'd seen the process, and I thought, I should work for *The New Yorker*.

I moved to New York in the fall of '78, still working for the Provincetown Art Association, researching ways of raising money from grants. Being from the Cape, and interested in the water, I had intended to write about the harbor of New York, not realizing that Joseph Mitchell had done that already. So I abandoned the subject and published my first piece in the magazine a year and a half after leaving Provincetown. I worked at the Art Association with Candy Jernigan who was a beautiful and brilliant artist from Florida.

RE: She was a true original in a town full of exotic people. Candy, Louis Postel, and Stewart Weiner, my high-school buddy from Cincinnati,

started the short-lived *Provincetown Magazine* in the 1970s.

AW: Candy was one of the last people I saw before I left for New York and she said, "I've never known anyone to leave Provincetown for New York and make a success of it"—which didn't really bother me, although I might have liked something a little more in the line of a blessing. Candy moved with Arnie Charnick to New York less than a year later and lived on First Avenue, which is still decorated with Charnick's signs, and we became very close. She did the covers for two of my books. For a while she was the art director of a series of porn magazines and had herself listed on the masthead as "Cindy Jeroniga." She and Arnie separated and she met Philip Glass on an airplane. They moved in together and were very happy with each other. They married when she was dying of cancer and bedridden. I had expected that for years on end I would write books and she would draw the covers for them.

Anyway, I would go around New York City, often on a bicycle, riding until I thought I saw something I could write about. Sometimes I would get on the train with the bike and take the train to the end of the line and ride my bike home, looking for a scene of some kind. Nothing bad ever happened, except that once I interrupted a three-card monte game, because I saw some tourists being fleeced, and the dealer and the two shills chased me three blocks down Fifth Avenue, past Tiffany's. I thought I needed to demonstrate my reliability to *The New Yorker*, so I tried to write a story for Talk of the Town every week, which made them think I was aggressive.

RE: Who did you submit them to?

AW: I would take the elevator to the nineteenth floor at 25 West 43rd Street and leave my story in an envelope addressed to "William Shawn." Eventually, one of them was purchased. And the next one, too. They were published in the magazine. Then I did a few more that were turned down. I hit a cold streak and gave up. Being able to say, in the 1980s, that I had pieces in *The New Yorker*, immediately set me apart from every other young writer in New York, much more than it would today. I was arriving at the magazine at a period when Talk of the Town had been written for three to four years almost entirely by Tony Hiss, George Trow, Ian Frazier, Jamaica Kincaid, Rick Hertzberg, Mark Singer, a woman named Jane Boutwell, and a guy named Wally White. James Stevenson wrote a lot of Talk stories, too. But for one reason or another, they were all withdrawing from doing it. Hertzberg had left to write speeches for President Carter. Frazier, Singer, and Kincaid had ambitions to write longer pieces. Trow was already writing longer pieces. Shawn needed material. For a while it worked for me, then it didn't work.

What it did do was get me an agent—actually Trow got her for me, a woman named Elaine Markson. Now my book, having been turned down ten or eleven times, was being submitted from an agent's office, with a letter saying, "Here's a book

by a young writer with work in *The New Yorker*." She sent it to Random House, where an editor named Joe Fox said that he wasn't going to make an offer, but if I was willing to rewrite a few things, he'd read it again. Fox was Truman Capote's editor for *In Cold Blood*. I did the work thinking somehow that he was going to buy it, and he did. After two years of trying, I had sold a book.

RE: Back then, how many hours would you put into writing each day?

AW: Four. Now I work all the time. It's harder to make money, it seems. But in those days, that seemed to be the writer's life: you work four hours a day, you have lunch, like Hemingway in Paris.

RE: That's what Jack Kahn did. When he was in Truro, he wrote in the morning, had lunch, played tennis at two o'clock and backgammon at four o'clock.

AW: I remember. You'd need a private income or a great deal of success to manage that now.

RE: How do you select your topics, and how has that changed over the years?

AW: Some are my own. My wife, Sara, has suggested several—she has very good ideas. The rest come from the magazine, more so now than they used to. I don't know whether this applies to your experience as a painter, but you do different work at different periods of your life, because you're a different person. I'm aware of the person who wrote *Midnights*. I can recollect him, but I'm not that person anymore. As for pleasure in writing, the piece that I most enjoyed was my book about William Maxwell, which is called *My Mentor*, because it allowed me for a year to sit down every day and write about Maxwell, who had died, and reclaim him in my imagination. It's an elegy, of a kind. But it was ten years ago, and I would write a different book now, because as I've gotten older I understand more of the concerns that were on his mind. I was more a son to him than a colleague.

RE: Writing, perhaps more than visual art, is always informed by your experiences and the way the world is changing.

AW: Well, some people don't mature, you know? It isn't a matter of age, it's a matter of application, and, to a degree, hardship—I don't want to say suffering, but disappointment, at least. Some people, even into old age, remain refinements of a kind of original personality, an original temperament. My father never matured. He made mistakes he tried to learn from, I suppose, but he didn't enlarge himself, or become a grander, more mature sensibility. He just insisted that the world accept him as he was and provide him a place. It's a child's view.

RE: I've always felt that you have a spare style. How would you describe your writing?

AW: From Maxwell, who exemplifies the method, I learned to write in such a way that the narrative advances a word at a time, as opposed to a sentence at a time, or a paragraph, or a page or a chapter at a time. I've had periods when perhaps my style is austere, and may ask more of a reader

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lady or she feels comfortable with, but it's hard for me to know.

RE: I am led to believe that Sebastian Junger is a fan of your work. Can you describe your relationship with Sebastian?

AW: I don't know him well. I was an admirer of *The Perfect Storm*. Aside from the accomplishment the book represents, I never saw a writer, or anyone else, handle sudden celebrity as handsomely as he did. Each year, to honor another year of *The Perfect Storm* being on the best-seller list, Graydon Carter, the editor of *Vanity Fair*, threw a party for Sebastian. I went one year, I think it was year four, and I had an encounter with a woman who just seemed fascinated by me, to a degree that was very unusual. I'd simply never experienced it. For about four minutes there was this intense press of attention. She was all but handing me her apartment key. Then somebody said, "Has anyone seen Sebastian?" And a look crossed her face as if to say, "He's standing right in front of you." When the person pointed to Sebastian, the woman's expression changed so quickly that it was as if a curtain had been dropped. So I can only imagine what it's like for him to encounter that time and again. Much less all the opportunities he must be given to open his mouth and say something he regrets. I think he's an impressive person.

The thing that interests me about *The Perfect Storm* is that it's a literary accomplishment. His

solutions to problems are intricate, complex, and dramatic. His solution to describing the deaths of the fishermen—at which, of course, he wasn't present—is thrilling.

RE: You did a reading at his New York bar, the Half King.

AW: That was kind of a disaster.

RE: I was there.

AW: Oh, that's right! The invitation had come out of Truro. I saw him on the beach and he said, "I have this new bar, and we have authors do readings. Why don't you do one?" No one told me the reading was supposed to last only fifteen minutes. I don't like to do readings, but I have a piece that amounts to a species of play, about a man who called himself Mr. Apology, and I read one of the parts and have friends do the others. I have done it with Richard Avedon and the actor Oliver Platt, and the writer Susanna Moore, and Kathryn Walker, who was then married to James Taylor and was an actress, and on that occasion I asked Donald Fagen, who is half of Steely Dan, to read one of the parts. The piece runs about forty-five minutes. The management wasn't pleased, and Sebastian wasn't there to intervene. We got it done, but they insisted that the waitresses circulate among the audience and sell drinks. It was sort of appropriate for that piece, actually.

RE: You have written ten books about fairly

esoteric subjects or topics. What do you think you have to do to write a best seller?

AW: I'm not trying to be evasive, but I really don't know. If I thought there was a formula I would have applied it by now, after ten books. I was sure that *A Violent Act* was going to be a best seller. I was sure that *The Happiest Man in the World*, about David Pearlman, who called himself Poppa Neutrino and spent time in Provincetown, was going to be a best seller. And I was pretty sure that *The Ice Balloon*, which came out last year, was going to be a best seller. So I really can't tell you. My work may be a little too chaste to be widely embraced. I think if you insist on doing it on your own terms, it takes longer.

RE: How do you select your book topics?

AW: The topics are opportunistic, designed to keep me at work. My situation is very different from that of an academic writer, who has a teaching position, and a field, such as Revolutionary War history, where years might be spent thinking about Washington at Valley Forge. They have a leisure I don't have. I'm a working writer. I don't have income outside of what I write for *The New Yorker* and earn from my books.

RE: Have any of your books been optioned for movies?

AW: About ten pieces or books have been optioned. *A Violent Act* came the closest to being made into a movie. There have been three screenplays written for that. Two screenplays have been written for *Midnights*. Thanks to Adam Gopnik, I was hired by Steven Spielberg to write one for it, but it never got past the stage of planning, because his people and I had very different ideas of what was appropriate.

RE: I have a vision of Poppa Neutrino being played by Alan Arkin.

AW: When that book came out, Fran Lebowitz said, "Did you get it to Jack?" I said, "Who's Jack?" She said, "Jack Nicholson." And I said, "Well, I don't really have a way to get it to Jack." And she said, "I'll get it to him." I don't know if she ever did or not. I didn't ask her, but I told my agent. He said, "Well, here's the thing. If *The Bucket List* is a hit, Hollywood is going to be going crazy trying to find parts for older actors, and your book will sell." *The Bucket List* wasn't a hit. ▲

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RAYMOND ELMAN started the Outer Cape Repertory Film Society in 1971, ran the To Be Coffeehouse from 1972 to 1973, and served for many years on the board of directors of the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, the Provincetown Group Gallery, and the Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater. He and Chris Busa cofounded Provincetown Arts in 1985. (Ray left the magazine in 1990, and in 1991 the magazine became a publication of the nonprofit Provincetown Arts Press.) His paintings have been widely exhibited and are included in numerous collections. His paintings of Jhumpa Lahiri, Robert Pinsky, Stanley Kunitz, and Alan Dugan are in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery. Ray is currently serving as the Chairman of the Board of Provincetown Arts. (See www.rayelman.com for more information.)



THE FINE ARTS WORK CENTER FELLOWS WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY IN 1975

THE FINE ARTS WORK CENTER

By Roger Skillings

The following are excerpts from a history in progress.

GROWING PAINS I

The Second Year

TN EARLY DAYS, nothing mattered more to the Fellows—or was more important to Work Center dynamics—than the Second-Year Question, which simmered ever more briskly from the end of the First Session in 1968 till it finally boiled over in the spring of 1974. Originally it was envisaged that Fellows who had done “distinguished work” might be invited back for a second year. In those early years, many who wanted a second year got one, with embittered exceptions. No established rules or procedures existed for making these decisions: the writing and visual arts staffs acted as selection committees and chose which Fellows to take back, how many to fund in all, and in what proportion of first- and second-year Fellows. In 1972, five of ten writers were second-year Fellows; on the art side, one of ten.



THE BARN AT THE FINE ARTS WORK CENTER IN THE EARLY DAYS

By March of '74, the question had eclipsed all others: FAWC had reached a stage where most Fellows, if not all, wanted a second year. Grown awkward in the presence of staff members, Fellows chafed together, privately gauging their chances, while the impending, unscheduled verdicts begot a harrowing tension and an unwonted, disagreeable aura of in-house rivalry.

Among the writing Fellows, voluble opinion held that all should get a second year, and they talked incessantly at Chairman Roger about the benefits to both themselves and the Work Center if they all got another year. And, indeed, all were well and truly bonded to the Work Center and to each other, convinced cohorts of its missionary zeal, and proven devotees of life in Provincetown, all three in the highest degree.

After half a glance at the projected budget, he decided that what the numbers added up to was Enough, and that loyalty and experience, not to mention affection—Dugan introduced Fellows as his colleagues—ought to rank high among virtues, and thus informed them, without consulting anyone, that they could all come back, a

most gratifying decision to convey, though not one he was authorized to make on his own.

It so happened that day that President Hudson Walker had arranged for a year-end cocktail party at the Holiday Inn in the East End, originally Howard Johnson's, long Michael Shay's—by 2012, Hot L. Everyone was there: Myron Stout, Jim Forsberg and Phil Malicoat, Judith Shahn and Alan Dugan, elders and Fellows, all but Stanley Kunitz and Jack Tworkov, et al., summer folk as yet unaware of *The Question & Its Answer*.

Munching and drinking, the jubilant writing Fellows vaunted their good fortune, all but Bob Weinstein, '73, '74, who was incensed at the abrogation of judgment. Aggravated consternation riled the blind-sided visual arts staff. The visual arts Fellows rejoiced, since it seemed clear they must get the same treatment. Now thought-gnawed Roger was the toast of the moment, among the Fellows.

Of course, it was a preposterous thing to have done, and a fait accompli. As Stanley said, it slowed our development. As policy, in the long run, it would have been stultifying.

At the Annual Board Meeting on July 17, eight voices addressed this first overt instance of *The Question*, which was to bedevil the Work Center for years to come. After energetic debate, with many aspects and shades expressed, but only one certainty—that there should be no blanket policy of automatic second years—the Board had the wisdom, led by Hudson, to leave such “professional decisions to the Staffs.”

Signs of the times: Of the thirty in attendance, four were Fellows. Six were former Fellows, four of whom were actually Board members. Eight other Board members belonged or had once belonged to the program staffs. Two others were artists never on the staff, Mervin Jules and Dorothy Gees Seckler, author of *Provincetown Painters*, that essential book.

Artists and writers were thus twenty of a total of thirty. Among the other ten were a lawyer, two selectmen, an architect, two collectors, and entrepreneur extraordinaire Nicholas Wells, who had arranged the purchase of 24 Pearl Street.

The Board did not intervene in, or impinge upon, the absolute right of the staffs to rule in their domain, the Fellowship programs themselves. In the end the writers took seven second-year Fellows—of whom six came—plus five new Fellows, obviously a backward proportion. The art side took four new and three second-year Fellows.

Odd indeed was Roger's failure to consult his daily associate in all things pertaining to the Work Center, Keith Althaus, '69, '70, who would surely have prevented such folly. In 2007, cringing with chuckles, neither could conjure an explanation.

The writing program gained in balance when Keith became Chairman in 1974. Even as a Fellow, he was the one others went to with their manuscripts. He was the most thoughtful and judicious, always concerned to identify their particular aims, to encourage their strengths, and first—like a good doctor—to do no harm. He was inclined to meet literary extremes or bêtise with a quizzical silence that promoted further thought.

As Chairman he managed with meticulous adjustments to solve personal and administrative conflicts and complications no matter how intractable they seemed. Without fuss, but obstinately, he never gave up till satisfactory outcomes were assured. His tenacious patience, tact, and calm sympathy for all stood the Work Center in good stead in those formless, overwrought years. Pushed by elders above, pulled by Fellows below, called to decide daily issues and carry out policy—which often meant making policy where none existed—the job, as Keith observed, “had a lot of headaches.”

Never to be forgotten was the sight of Visual Arts Chair Sharli Powers Land grinning at them in midair *grand jeté*, bearing on outstretched palm an ashtray for Robert Motherwell.

Once again, in 1975, the months preceding the second-year decisions in April were fraught with the same unhappy contortions, and were



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met by the rejected Fellows with the same feelings of injustice and favoritism.

On July 12, 1976, the writing staff abolished the second year. In exceptional cases the staff could invite Fellows to return as *Staff Assistants* with specific administrative duties, but no one could apply. Present: Dugan, Kunitz, Althaus, Skillings, Marge Piercy, Arturo Vivante, and Program Coordinator Martha Fowlkes Egloff, '73. The visual arts staff, which had reorganized itself into a Visual Arts Committee, adopted a nearly identical rule. The specific duties were not specified.

Soon after their arrival in the fall of 1976, the Fellows received brief memos of the change, which came as disenchantment to first-year Fellows, who, often coming from afar, had counted on the chance of a second year. Opposition coalesced, gained traction and momentum, began to pose questions of its own: What was the Fine Arts Work Center? Who or what was it designed to serve? How could its express purposes be best accomplished?

William O'Rourke, '70, '71, wrote from Rutgers, "The attitude of the Staff, as I see it, is one of exhaustion in the face of... the accumulation of bad feeling over the years. The staff wishes to be absolved of the responsibilities of making... uncomfortable choices."

In-house, the new rule looked to be no solution at all, but only the blanket reversed, virtually asphyxiating hope of a second year, while exacerbating the problem of favoritism or its appearance, as Fellows vied to be deemed an exceptional case. On what could such judgments be based?

Second-year Fellows felt most strongly of all that the second year should be retained. Polling of others from earlier years, and especially those living in Provincetown, confirmed their belief that the second year was "infinitely more valuable than the first," that it was of crucial importance in introducing new Fellows to the Work Center and the town; in providing continuity through the years of ways, knowledge, and lore; and in making it more possible for at least some Fellows to settle in the area. Without the second year, the Work Center would be a place of come-and-go transience, like Yaddo and MacDowell. The vote in favor of some sort of second-year program was 24 to 2.

On December 2, a meticulous, all-inclusive paper on the subject—five single-spaced pages authored by second-year Fellow Ben Brooks, '75, '76, and signed by five others—took up the whole question in minute detail. It argued that to eliminate the second year would be "detrimental to the Work Center," would "significantly alter its nature," and conflict with its "stated goals."

It proposed a two-tier system of two-year Fellowships—once underway, each year would have ten first-year and ten second-year Fellows, five and five for each side. Technically it would entail doing twice as much for half as many Fellows. But general benefits would ensue, drawbacks decrease.

The trade-off would eliminate the pains and perplexities of the second-year judgments. It would dispel the brevity of seven months by doubling it, and more than doubling it, because it would make it more possible and likely for Fellows to stay on and find ways to put down roots.

Fellows' second years were universally agreed to be more productive than their first, and therefore good for the Work Center's rate of success, good for funding. Much of one's first year was spent coming, getting settled and acquainted with the Work Center community and town, making plans for what to do next and where to go, and packing up—easy for poets, not painters—and leaving. A vagrant life was bad for all, but especially the artist.

Concentration in every sense would increase. The second-year Fellows would speed integration of the new: there would always be a bank of knowledge of milieu. Second-year Fellows would provide "the most Fellow input into the administration of the Center, and keep it from being totally run from above." The second year was the surest way to replenish the arts community in Provincetown, which was, after all, exactly what the founders intended.

This beguiling road was not taken, probably providentially, but it does highlight the Work Center's early, intimate, civic phase, when Fellows took an active part in FAWC governance and development. The paper reads: "Our concern has solely to do with the effect of the new policy on what we think of as 'our' (partially) Work Center."

That was tactfully put but heartfelt truth, not so far-fetched as it now sounds. The dream of a new, vigorous, permanent community arising around the Fine Arts Work Center amid America's most prolific arts colony, arresting its decline, was not on the face of it incredible. No one foresaw the real-estate juggernaut and gentrification that would evict much of the washashore population, especially un-monied young artists and writers.

On January 7, another meeting was held. Present were writing staff members Marge Piercy and Arturo Vivante; Former Fellows Sharli, Martha, Keith, and Roger, now all part of the administration; and second-year Fellows Ben Brooks, Debora Greger, '76, Tamara Kennelly, '75, '76, and David Longwell, '75, '76. Hope of two-year Fellowships having evaporated, the signatories proposed that there be a designated number of second-year Fellows—two or three per year for each side—and that the second-year writing applications be read by writers not resident in Provincetown at the time.

And so, after several years of further refinement, it was finally resolved: there would be two second-year writing Fellows, one poet and one fiction writer, their anonymous manuscripts juried by an outside poet and an outside fiction writer.

The visual arts side would take one, two, or three second-year Fellows, and use a different jury procedure. Second-year applicants wouldn't have to make the first cut, but would receive an automatic pass into the finals, where they would be merged with first-year applicants and judged without prejudice by a mixed jury of in-house and outside members. Or they would be judged separately, with one, two, or three places designated available, with equal loss of first-year Fellows.

But the pains of the second-year competition persisted tenaciously, and died away only slowly. In 1981, the writing staff's policy was to take two second-year Fellows, but not from the current year. Dubbed the "Altoona System" by its inventor, Keith Althaus, it decreed that you had to go away (to Altoona) before you could come back, which eliminated the face-to-face of victory and defeat among Fellows who had spent seven close months together in friendship and mutual support. But it worked woe with those hoping for a chance to get established in town.

These trials diminished as the organization matured and grew in complexity, separating the administration from the Fellows, as was inevitable as the burdens of governance, maintenance of property, and the business of budget spiraled up.

But even today, the day the names of the second-year Fellows are posted is a silent day, a sparse day of circumspect eyes, winners not looking glad, losers neither mad nor sad. A day the Program Committees are not much in evidence, start of departures, day of losses all around.

GROWING PAINS II

Local Artists

For a while, street dogma insisted that by design no locals would ever get a Fellowship, if only because the Work Center was devoted to bringing new people to town.

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MINA AND ANTONIO FERREIRA INSIDE THE PORTUGUESE BAKERY ON MINA'S BIRTHDAY, BRIGHTENED BY FLOWERS, JULY 19, 1995

But there were few eligible writers in town to apply, apart from former Fellows. It is, always was, a painters' town. Local artists tended to be landscape and seascapes painters, painters of weather, of people, their lives, habitations, and work, truth and beauty their *raison d'être*, which increasingly stood against them with the movement toward outside jurors, who, as time went on, formed conventions of their own, always seeking the new and unique.

Fashions came and went, complete in themselves. And it may have been that artists of the dawning era of immediate media felt themselves always at the ever-disappearing end point of history and were loath to fall into an abyss or extend an ephemeral past. Jurors didn't know the applicants' names or provenance, and didn't care. It was the modes of the day that ruled, as perhaps they always do. Only the days had been drastically abridged.

After 1968 and 1969, when the Work Center served only artists, the only local painters to be accepted were Peter Macara, '77, the lone native; Richard Baker '89; Polly Burnell, '93; and Tabitha Vevers, '95, daughter of Elspeth Halvorsen and Tony Vevers, themselves washashore artists, who owned a house in Provincetown, but were away during the academic year, sometimes renting their house to Fellows.

Of the seventeen visual arts Fellowships awarded in '68 and '69, only six or seven went to Provincetown residents, only two of them native-born—Moe Van Dereck, '68, and Conrad Malicoat, '68, '69, son of the late Barbara and Phil Malicoat, a permanently unique case, as offspring of a FAWC founder.

On September 23, 1994, Sal Del Deo resigned from the Visual Arts Committee, concluding that his presence on the jury served no purpose

since none of the areas . . . I thought important were being represented in the final selection of Fellows. . . . The selection of finalists very clearly reflects a diminishing number of painters, and, as one of the original founders

of the Work Center, I must express my regret and disappointment. . . . The tradition of oil painting . . . exhaustive and stellar . . . seems to be disappearing. This leads me to . . . feel that the selection process itself is seriously flawed in that it tends to perpetuate a narrow approach in the selection of applicants. . . .

The Visual Arts Committee has always been composed of serious professional artists. They have been and are . . . entirely competent to make a final selection . . . especially because the committee so conscientiously screens the applicants in an exhaustive . . . process. The intrusion of an outside juror or jurors at the last moment . . . has always seemed to me to be a derailing of their entire effort. . . . The fact is that the perpetuation of a particular bias seems [to inhere in] the present form of a second-tier jury system . . . more than it would if the Committee had the "the first and final choices to make."



The first issue of Chris Busa's *Provincetown Arts*, dated August 1985, reprinted Stanley Kunitz's memorial tribute to Jack Tworkov (his longtime next-door neighbor), which reads in part:

Like most true artists, he went through alternating cycles of pride and doubt, with respect for his own work. He was fearful of settling for what he called "the civilized dance." Few contemporaries would have the courage to say, as he did toward the end, "I have misgivings about my present work." He had chosen an art that did not strive for overt significance or meaning. Now he began to feel, as he put it, "some inner deprivation, some sorrowful regret that my art is not more explicitly some expression of existence outside and beyond myself. . . ." He would not deny that when art loses touch with human and societal values, it is reduced to existing "for itself by itself." "This is misery," he commented. "But where is the way out?"

I've seen my life not merely as "a way of life, but a way to save my life." The dilemma of a style, he perceived, had implications beyond the mere periphery of self-congratulation. "Art can pollute our life," he was convinced, "as much as technology can pollute our air and water."

It is a curious side issue that the young townsfolk (or, for that matter, the mature) seldom or never come to Work Center events, seem never to have taken up art or writing as a way of life—excepting only Peter Macara and the native poet and novelist Frank Gaspar, long since removed to the West Coast—and that is truly lamentable, considering that the Work Center dates from 1968, that Fellows have often taught in the local schools, not to mention the wide variety of events advertised as free and open to the public that the Work Center produces year-in, year-out, year-round.

Saddest, perhaps most emblematic in that regard, was the evening, thirty years on in 1998, devoted to the great Modernist poet Fernando

Pessoa, said to be Portugal's greatest poet since Camoëns (1524–1580). There was a nearly full house in the Stanley Kunitz Common Room. Longtime Fine Arts Work Center luminaries read translations. Then Antonio Ferreira, proprietor of the Portuguese Bakery, read Pessoa in the original most beautifully. That was a rare regalement not to be missed.

It was a fine summer night, a most exciting and memorable event, but besides the featured reader, Antonio Ferreira himself, his late wife, Guilhermina (Mina to family and friends), and their late, good friend Mary Janopolis, owner of the Portuguese Bakery, there were very few Portuguese attendees, and quite possibly not one single youth.



In 1965, the Ferreiras and their three children immigrated to Provincetown, where they had friends. In 1976, Mary Janopolis leased them the Provincetown Portuguese Bakery, which flourished in their hands. Antonio became involved in other community projects. He was fundamental in creating the Provincetown Portuguese Club, which he directed for several years. He created and directed the Portuguese School. At the request of community radio WOMR, he produced and hosted a weekly Portuguese show dedicated to the Portuguese community on the Cape. At the insistence of the Town Moderator, he accepted a nomination to serve on the finance committee.

He was proud to be invited to the Fine Arts Work Center podium to read Pessoa, a poet he had always admired. Looking back, he is sure that had he retired in Provincetown he would again be involved in community affairs, and the Fine Arts Work Center would certainly draw him in. But when his family all moved to sunny Florida, he followed them in January of 2007, and thus was lost to Provincetown, where he had been such a great Portuguese Cultural Center in his own right.

He is, he says, probably in a position to understand the reason why there were so few attendees at the Pessoa reading. Forty years ago, the majority of the Portuguese residents were fishermen and their families, not fluent in English and certainly not involved in cultural events. At that time, the average immigrant had only gone to school for three or four years. Antonio Ferreira and his wife were exceptions.

But this is 2013. It is too sad to think that nothing has changed. Is it too much to hope that the generous energies and venturesome spirit of Antonio Ferreira might engage the imagination of native-born Provincetown youth, call them to envisage the exciting possibilities of a life in the arts and literature? ▀

ROGER SKILLINGS was a Fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in 1969–1970, and is a longtime Trustee and Chair of the Writing Committee. His eighth book and fifth collection of stories, *Summer Nights*, will be published in the spring by Pressed Wafer. Skillings was a Featured Artist in the 2011/12 issue of Provincetown Arts.



Foreword by John Skoyles

The pleasure of editing this selection came from finding poems that, as Frost said, "begin in delight and end in wisdom." I hope I've offered readers a variety of delightful and wise voices. The poems in this sheaf are alternately narrative, lyrical, magical, understated, elliptical, calm, and even seething.

Carl Dennis questions whether the "creator" is confined to one world, and speculates on the power and meaning of that god's first words. Jonathan Aaron's poem ends in a conspiratorial bond between a donkey and a schoolboy whose teacher had called him a donkey. The speaker of Kate Desjardins's piece starts with the simplest of declarations and ends with a complex question. Michael Morse, who last spring chaired the Association of Writers & Writing Programs' panel on Alan Dugan, plays off Dugan's own line, "Dugan's deathward, darling," capturing that poet's character as well as his work. He describes Dugan's headstone in Truro as "dark as you could be / even when surrounded by sun in a cemetery." Andrea Cohen sums up the chaos and insularity of a life in unforgettable images of a wife, children, a dog, and an omen. The observer in Joshua Rivkin's poem seems to know he might be heading for the same fate as his neighbor, a dream undone. More than frigid wind cuts through the teacher and students in Afaa Michael Weaver's Chicago poem, which depicts the city itself. In a small orbit, Diane Wald takes the reader a long distance, from the tactile palpability of exotica to a dream of immortality. Cleopatra Mathis's speaker is as critical of herself as she is of the person addressed, characterizing her nature as obsessed with "naming," as is every poet's way. Pablo Medina's vatic tone is enhanced by an inverted syntax that combines with direct statement, making all the more vivid the fire "alive in the heart of Jesus." The afternoon described in Charles Simic's poem is overseen by an "unknown benefactor," who is everywhere present and nowhere visible. Chekhov's notebooks are alluded to in Jean Valentine's poem, along with a direct reference to Tolstoy. Love is dangerously fragile here, where even books are shaped from clay. Stairways conspire against Amber McBride's narrator, whose song has no syllables.

Thirteen poets, thirteen angles of perception, and thirteen ways of recording these differences.

I've long been taken with Carl Jung's belief that if you do serious work, unknown friends will come. These poets have done their work, and I welcome the new friends who will find it here.

First Words

As the first sentence of a creator,
It's hard to do better than "Let there be light."
Let there be light in the workroom
So the task of shaping a world may proceed
With no wasted effort, no guessing,
And the maker can say at the end of each day,
"This part of creation is all it could be."

But after he rests from his six-day workout
He'll want to begin on another world,
Not settle for the job of custodian.
A world that might employ another first sentence
Or no sentence at all. Does a good painter
Choose to repeat himself forever
After he makes a painting he's proud of,
Or is he eager to branch out?

A world that this time may not be planned
So far ahead, that may allow
For eons of groping before a plant
Hits on a way to use whatever sunlight
Happens to be available, before a worm
Settles into being a worm in earnest
And a bird discovers a use for feathers
Beyond its need for heating and cooling.

Some houses are made with blueprints
And some begin small, without them, and grow.
First it's a fisherman's cabin just for weekends.
Then, over decades, bedrooms are added
As needed for a growing family,
And what about a porch facing south,
And a telescope in the attic window
Aimed at the stars.

And if a creator is confined to one world,
He'll want to unmake it each day before dawn
So he can make it again in an instant
With his first directive, "Let there be light."
Look. Here's the new sun, much like the old one,
Rising on schedule above the new horizon.
Here's a new mist to be burned away.

Jonathan Aaron

Sleeping Donkey

after Jacques Prévert

Children, look. The donkey's asleep.
Don't wake him up.
Don't play any tricks on him.
When he's not asleep he's often sad.
He doesn't get to eat every day,
people forget to give him water to drink,
and they sometimes beat him, too.
Look at him. Living and breathing
and installed contentedly in his dream, isn't he
a lot more handsome than all those boring statues
you've been encouraged to admire?
Grown-ups will tell you that chickens dream
of chicken-feed, and donkeys of oats.
They say such things because they don't know what else to say.
They'd do better paying attention to
their own dreams, their own little nightmares.
See the two feathers on the grass next to his head?
If he saw them before he went to sleep,
maybe he's dreaming he's a bird flying through the air.
Or maybe he's dreaming of something else—
that he's at a nursery school, say,
hidden in a closet full of art supplies.
One little boy is having a hard time with an arithmetic problem.
Nicolas, you donkey! the teacher says.
For Nicolas, this is a disaster.
He's about to cry. The donkey steps from his hiding place.
The teacher doesn't see him.
The donkey figures out the little boy's problem.
The little boy takes the result and shows it to the teacher,
and the teacher says, Why, Nicolas, this is excellent!
The donkey and Nicolas look at each other and start laughing,
but the teacher can't hear them.
And if the donkey isn't dreaming of this,
it's because he's dreaming of something else.
All you can know for sure is that he's dreaming.
Everyone dreams.

Michael Morse

At Dugan's Grave

Dugan, you're still here, you and your darling
less interactive but embedded near Province Lands
where any kind of iamb inclination feels old hat.

So let's talk. You don't know me from Adam
and I'm standing on a plot with you and Judy:
that hardly makes us a trinity, but I liked what you said

and came here to pay respects in early spring
under a warm sun starting its sure-fire cross-fade
out of late afternoon—it's already leaving

its leave-taking just as you once walked the dunes
aware of limits and bounds, the land's and our own.
And your poems were all about punch-phrasing,

straight-up no-crap beats from a turntable opposite
whatever consciousness played at that moment:
Butch fucks up Judy's daises; the sea grinds things up.

Right about now I start to crave a BLT,
and I'd like to think you'd want one, too,
either *in situ* or dreamt, all things being equal.

On your marker there's bird shit and a little star of lichen,
and I think you'd like that as much as your slate-gray stone
that in the late light looks as dark as you could be

even when surrounded by sun in a cemetery.
And whatever tree is right by your plot, maybe cherry,
something that will petal quick and drop down,

(*No flowers, no us*) its branches look blasted back
from winds off the bay that persist and insist
on west to east, back to where days begin again.

Diane Wald

L as in labyrinth

black nights, white peonies,
and the olives: castelvetrano, mantequilla, cerignola.

it may never happen to me again,
that which i loved so much.

the sunset's starting early, violet pink
outside the doctor's office window.
he knows people i know yet somehow
i trust him with my secrets

as if we were lovers, or even as if
we were strolling rhode island again

like two people who could not die.

Kate Desjardins

Years

When I walk under the maples
in my yard, on the way
from my car with groceries, or mail,
or the undone sandal of my three year old,
I see I've failed to find
proper treatments to chase borers and mites,
ignored the chore of careful pruning,
leaving roots burdened,
and branches grown across others,
each slight recorded in rings, year by year.
What language have we ignored
that would finally answer everything,
speak to us the lessons
learned by standing in one place?

Andrea Cohen

Camera Obscura

It's the movie where everything happens without you: your wife on the sidewalk, wondering what she's forgotten, your son trying to retrieve a postcard dropped in the box, a dog slipping its leash, your daughter not looking both ways, a red flag flapping. It all happens as you sit in a darkened room formerly used for storage. You are a darkened room formerly used for many purposes. It happens upside down and backwards, in Technicolor, in full sun, and seems to be happening in the past, so you can't alter or enter the chain of events. Wittgenstein said a body couldn't experience itself falling through space, but you feel pain in the pricked room as Main Street parades past, as if projected onto a train slowly leaving the station. Such a flood of melancholy, of nostalgia for what never was or will be. Surely the Germans have a word for that, surely someone in another dark room is composing a symphony on the topic. It's a requiem, atonal. Your wife, glancing up, appears to hear it.

*Cleopatra Mathis**I Can't Stop Talking*

The hidden agenda is my goodness,
 thinly disguised in my reporting
 on the nature outside
 where I walk, always without you.
 Today's observation: the fish,
 alarmingly large for such a small pond,
 waiting in the shadows. Black torpedoes:
 what kind I couldn't say, only that they dozed
 in the greeny slime.

The truth is
 their obliviousness brought me back
 to that fault in you. And how I am
 not merciless enough, confusing mercy with care.
 But your eyes gaze elsewhere, not telling.
 I don't bother then
 with my discovery of the heron,
 how I caught her one deft motion:
 a small fish in her beak. Instead,

watching you move away,
 I rush into my quick lament: that tree I shook
 to rid it of dead wood
 brought down a bird's new nest.
 And what bird was it, whose eggs?
 I go after naming, don't I?
 But you pour a glass of wine.
 You do not care for names.

*Pablo Medina**Sacred Heart of Jesus: 9/11/01*

Sacred is the master plan with its emphasis
 on tenderness and trembling. Gone arrogance,
 gone reliance on blue certainties.

The visits of angels are confounding.
 Sacred is the wreckage of memory.
 The planes fly in and disappear as souls

disappear. No sanctity in clouds.
 The chest is exposed,
 the fire is alive in the heart of Jesus.
 Bliss and death are one.

Across the street where the pigeons
 coo and peck through trouble
 the suited executive and the Chinese
 delivery boy join the ruins and the crowds.

PO

Afaa Michael Weaver

Cut Back, Fight Back

The Chicago Teachers' Strike

On Stony Island Avenue, the wind cuts through wool and turns to fire, the fire turns to ice and cuts you up, cuts you down worse than a rusty knife, so cold you forget about winter, your mind drifting way away from pain, until you get to where you are going.

There is nothing to keep the wind away from Chicago, the mountains too far away, nothing but cows, cornfields when you leave the city, as if this is all there is to the world, a flat place that has no end when you stand in the middle, a city that makes you dizzy when you stand on its edge.

I catch the bus with my students, I watch them watching me, wondering what they are going to do if things stay this way, they growing up like me too poor to buy a car, catching the bus, but I tell them the car is in the shop. *What shop?* they ask, and I say *The one waiting for you.*

Jean Valentine

You Speak

I'm not without you friend
but without stars,
skin & fingers, borders

not separated out. Here
you get past everything
all at once. I remember

everything. *That white tree.*
And what was never there
to remember, I remember

as if I've come upon
a whole room full of clay books
that I can read with my fingers,

as we once read each other,
younger than water, remember? And
“—if transformation comes?”

I could compare it maybe to a train
in Tolstoy, already having forgiven
everything, forward & backward:

the train is saying
Come on. I'm writing on a tablecloth.
I love you.

FE

Amber McBride

I Sing This Song Every Night

If I had a hymn it would sound like skittles
spilt on the kitchen floor,
water inside the tin roof of a mouth,
but mostly like a sponge sinking.

Yellow and round it sings about nothing
because it's busy drowning itself.

Dripping, filthy and full of oceans.

No one ever cares about the stuff
that needs cleaning, the layer of film
that builds up on everything.

Did you know every night the creak
of the fourth floorboard plans against my footsteps
which lead me upstairs to my shower where
I have grown accustomed to conversations with water?

A good scrubbing won't fix this.

Even one's insides should be brushed daily.
Except for the heart, leave it alone.

It grows smart with dirt.

RY

Joshua Rivkin

Neighbor

Goes the gossip—before he could finish their dream,
two stories, bay windows, a granite island in the chef's
kitchen, his wife died. Building stopped. He moved
back to town. Disappeared. And what calls us to the
things of this world, sends us out to be messengers or
shepherds, to be wolves or sheep, breaks apart. In the
window I see how they might've stood with their backs
to the fire looking out to discs of ice repeat across the
cove, her hand on the hard chip of vertebrae above his
belt, and across their line chokeberries clench like a
child's fist, or a suitor's apology bouquet. They keep
watch: small red eyes hold color all winter. Everyday
proof of strength and poison. Take me, don't take me.
Love me, love me not. I make a list to carry, carry it so
it'll be done, done so I can sleep in the order of fulfilled
desire. Eggs & milk. Snow tires. Sharpen the chain. I
drive into town, pass the unfinished house; snow col-
lects around the foundation and a little crooked knife
of a stream, a cold light, a bare tree I can't name at his
property's unkempt edges, and whatever in me that
might stop is undone by what keeps going.

T

John Skoypes has published four books of poems: *A Little Faith*, *Permanent Change*, *Definition of the Soul*, and *The Situation*. He is also the author of two books of non-fiction: *Generous Strangers and Other Moments from My Life*, a collection of personal essays; and a memoir, *Secret Frequencies: A New York Education*. He is currently Professor in the Writing, Literature, and Publishing Department of Emerson College, and the poetry editor of *Ploughshares*. His autobiographical novel, *A Moveable Famine*, will be published next year by the Permanent Press.



Jonathan Aaron is the author of three books of poems, most recently *Journey to the Lost City* (Ausable Press, 2006).

Andrea Cohen's most recent poetry collections are *Kentucky Derby* and *Long Division* (Salmon Poetry); a new collection, *Furs Not Mine*, is forthcoming from Four Way Books. She directs the Blacksmith House Poetry Series in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Carl Dennis is the author of twelve books of poems, most recently *Callings* (Penguin, 2010). His book *Practical Gods* won the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. He lives in Buffalo, New York.

Kate Desjardins is the membership and events coordinator for the Concord Poetry Center in Concord, Massachusetts. Her recent work appears in the *Tipton Poetry Journal*.

Cleopatra Mathis's seventh collection of poems, *Book of Dog*, came out early this year from Sarabande Books. She is the Frederick Sessions Beebe '35 Professor in the Art of Writing at Dartmouth College.

Amber McBride is currently the media assistant at the Furious Flower Poetry Center in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Her poems have appeared in *Bare Hands Poetry* and *Words Apart*.

Pablo Medina's latest collection of poems is *The Man Who Wrote on Water*. He teaches at Emerson College.

Michael Morse has published poems in numerous journals and anthologies, including the *American Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, *jubilat*, and *The Best American Poetry 2012*. A former Fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown from 2008 to 2010, he lives in New York City and teaches at the Ethical Culture Fieldston School.

Joshua Rivkin's poems have appeared in *Slate*, *Harvard Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Best New Poets*, and elsewhere. He is a 2012–13 Writing Fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center.

Charles Simic's *New and Selected Poems: 1962–2012* was published this spring by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Jean Valentine's *Door in the Mountain: New and Collected Poems, 1965–2003*, was awarded the 2004 National Book Award for Poetry. Her most recent book is *Break the Glass*, published in 2010 by Copper Canyon Press. She is also the co-translator with Ilya Kaminsky of *Dark Elderberry Branch: Poems of Marina Tsvetaeva*, published in 2012 by Alice James Books.

Diane Wald lived in Provincetown for three years in the seventies, two of those at FAWC. Her latest book is *Wonderbender*, from 1913 Press.

Afaa Michael Weaver's new book is *The Government of Nature* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013). He is the Alumnae Professor of English at Simmons College.

Charles Simic

Peaceful Afternoon

Generously donated for our use
By an unknown benefactor
Who made sure the sky will be blue,
The breeze mild and caressing

As we lie in the shade of a tree,
Our eyelids heavy, our yawns
Lengthening and lengthening
In the stillness of the afternoon,

Till time itself comes to a stop
With its brightly-colored circus wagons
Far from any village or town.
The cards in a fortune teller's deck

Lying face down on her table,
Only a horse in a field permitted
To flick his tail and a woman
Sunbathing in the nude to swat a fly.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE HARBORMASTER'S DAUGHTER

By Heidi Jon Schmidt

NAL Accent, 2012

A BOOK REVIEW BY MARGARET CARROLL-BERGMAN AND MARY BERGMAN

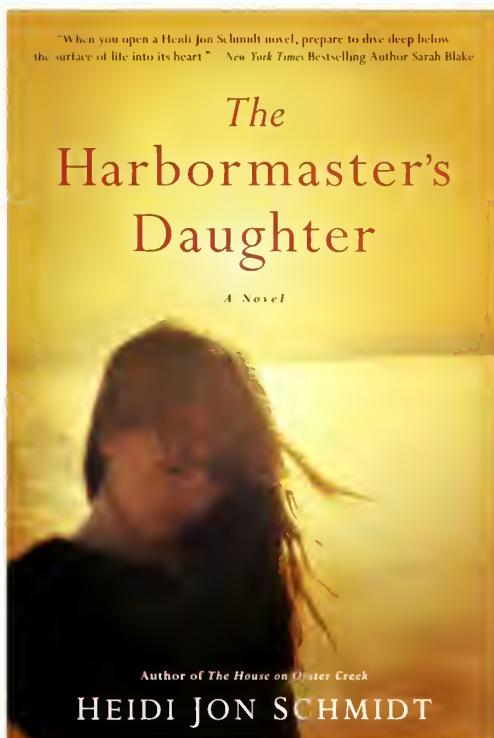
MOST OF THE fun in reading Heidi Jon Schmidt's books set in Oyster Creek, *The Harbormaster's Daughter* (2012) and *The House on Oyster Creek* (2010), is that everyone on the Outer Cape, native and outlander, should be looking for slices of friends, neighbors, and enemies in the collages of personality portraits that Schmidt has painted—all fictional, of course.

Some might think Oyster Creek, and the people who live there, are unreal: We're talking about a place where one of the town characters wears a wool cape and quotes Shakespeare, and another rides a bike, while balancing a clam rake, up and down its main street; where there is a rift between the haves and the have-nots, except the wealthy are blissfully unaware of the tension; where the harbormaster has to beg Town Meeting for a boat; where the town manager wears a bow tie and seersucker suit; and where, like the matriarch Victoria Barkley in the TV series *The Big Valley*, a wife could come to love her husband's illegitimate child and it would be seen as a sign of feminist strength.

Yet, Oyster Creek gives us a new way of looking at any small New England town, especially Provincetown, as a reverse painting on glass. On looking at the town from the bay, Schmidt writes, "It was like stepping through a looking glass to see the town from that perspective. All the lines and contours were unfamiliar, beautiful in a whole new way."

The Harbormaster's Daughter is loosely based on the murder of heiress and single mother Christa Worthington, a "summer kid" who left the high life of New York City for a simpler one on Cape Cod. Yet that dream was short-lived. Worthington was beaten and stabbed to death in her Truro beach cottage during the winter of 2002. It was a story that touched the hearts and minds of all—Worthington's two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Ava, unharmed, spent two days guarding and trying to revive her mother's lifeless body until a neighbor stumbled upon the haunting scene.

Tony Jackett, father of six, commercial fisherman and shellfish warden, fathered Ava in a secret love affair. He had told his wife of thirty years, Susan, about the illegitimate child when the baby was a year old. The three adults were forging a new life centered around the child when Worthington was killed. While Worthington was a sophisticate, willing to have a "European" relationship with the Portuguese fisherman, she was no match for Tony's wife.



"Perhaps she wasn't prepared to deal with Susan's kindness," said Tony Jackett in the 2002 *Provincetown Arts* interview "Our Tony."

Much has been written about the Worthington murder, most notably *Invisible Eden* by Maria Flook, and *Ptown: Art, Sex, and Money on the Outer Cape* by Peter Manso. Both Flook and Manso live in Truro and give journalistic accounts of the murder. After Chris McCowen, a simpleminded garbage man, was convicted of killing Worthington, Manso wrote another book about the murder, *Reasonable Doubt: The Fashion Writer, Cape Cod, and the Trial of Chris McCowen*. Schmidt is the first to write about the murder from the standpoint of the daughter. Although Schmidt's is a fictionalized account, it is based on true events, much like Norman Mailer's *Tough Guys Don't Dance* (1987), which touched upon the serial murders committed in 1969 on the Outer Cape by Tony Costa. However, Schmidt uses her novel not to rehash the murder mystery, but as a springboard to show how every single life is a heroic journey.

The Harbormaster's Daughter starts with the illicit romance between summer girl Sabine Gray and townie Franco Neves. Then, years after Sabine's murder, we meet Sabine and Franco's daughter, Vita Gray, as a high-school student. Vita is part Portuguese and part "washashore," a word the locals use to show their contempt for outsiders who move to their tightly knit community, and yet one the outsiders, desperate to belong, eagerly take on as their own.

Although Vita is Franco's daughter, she is adopted by LaRee Farnham, a college friend of Sabine's, who is a nurse and lives in Oyster Creek.

The local children bully Vita because of Sabine's indiscretion in having seduced a married man and, worse yet, having been murdered by a fellow Portuguese townie. Vita's father does not know how to have a relationship with her. She is an awkward, yet talented child who finds her niche in the local theater company, which is producing Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

It is the mother-daughter bond that Schmidt plumbs. As every mother knows, raising a child has its ups and downs; some days it can be thankless, yet it is always fulfilling. Birth mother, adoptive mother, stepmother, whatever the mother-child bond, it is as strong and as weak as the silk in a spider's web.

Schmidt writes of LaRee's mothering:

Finding ways to make life safe and steady, making sure there were beautiful surprises along with the discouraging ones—cookies when she came home from school, the miniature rose in a pot on the table, Bumble the cat curled up in a patch of afternoon sun. Holding the ice pack on the bruise, explaining that the mean girl had the problem, reinforcing the sugar cube model of the United States Capitol with popsicle sticks, making sure the gossip about Sabine never reached her, that the tabloids with their headlines were folded away out of sight . . . helping her see, when she didn't win the blue or the red or even the yellow ribbon, that she still had reason to be proud . . .

Schmidt does not limit her beautifully worded portraits to people: she has a grasp of the natural world that is worthy of Henry Beston's classic memoir *The Outermost House: A Year of Life on the Great Beach of Cape Cod*. She finds beauty even, or especially, in the places where the flowers have refused to grow:

Did they not live among heath and furze, short trees with branches like bony hands reaching from the grave, thorned and crusted in lichen, sprouting thick, brittle leaves and maybe sour little plums with huge pits? Beach plums, cranberries . . . hard, bitter fruits that grew tough enough, low enough to live where the wind never stopped blowing . . .

Schmidt writes vividly of a time when the silver-bellied cod was in such plentitude, one could swim in it. Her descriptions of Portuguese fishermen are evocative of the two Charles Hawthorne paintings that hang in the Provincetown Town Hall, *Fish Cleaners* and *The Crew of the Philomena Manta*:

The hold was so full that the fish had spilled over onto the deck and to get anywhere you had to climb through them, slipping and sliding,

feeling one leg go out from under you suddenly, then floundering up again and finding a dogfish down the leg of your waders. And there they all were, his father and his uncle Eddie and Joe Matos, culling fish, sorting fish, filleting fish, climbing over hills and slipping into valleys of fish. . . . It had not occurred to him, not to any of them, that they wouldn't pull their nets in full and heavy like that every day for the rest of their lives.

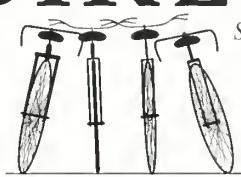
Just as Hawthorne created a world inspired by his artist friends and the locals, so, too, does Schmidt create in this novel a real, and extraordinary, world: a seaside community divided by violence and betrayal, but also healed by bonds of family and friendship and nature. It is a courageous endorsement of the power of art. □

MARGARET CARROLL-BERGMAN is the publisher emeritus of Provincetown Arts. She is a former newspaper editor for the Nantucket Independent and now works as a regional news editor for AOL/Huffington Post/Patch.com.

MARY BERGMAN grew up in Provincetown. She graduated from Smith College and has her master's degree from American University. Mary interned at National Public Radio and the Smithsonian and now works at the US Capitol, yet Provincetown will always be her home port.

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ROBINSON ALONE

By Kathleen Rooney

Gold Wake Press, 2012

A BOOK REVIEW BY CASSANDRA GILLIG

WELDON KEES IS a poet's poet. Lost in the annals of our shifting and easily frustrated modern canon, Kees is sometimes anthologized, though more often forgotten, especially by those outside of the poetry world. Even considering his contemporaries—masterful brooders such as Berryman, Roethke, and Jarrell—Kees dwells in an inconceivably dark place. While other poets merely identified the troubling state of '40s and '50s America, Kees's work relied on an embodiment, an absorption of the despairing decline of society and an incorporation of that exact deterioration into his portrayal of the "self." In "Statement With Rhymes," a young Kees writes, "always I'm pursued / by thoughts of what I am." An older poem, "Turtle," is equally disconsolate: "I felt a husk that moved / Inside me, torpid, dry." Kees's struggle to commit to a single image of himself is fraught with consciously hopeless language and a learned bitterness.

It is not at all curious that Kathleen Rooney's Kees-inspired novel-in-verse, *Robinson Alone*, is a hundred-page project that takes inspiration from only four of Kees's poems. Kees's "Robinson" pieces are a striking experiment with third-person storytelling—narrative poems much akin to those in Berryman's *Dream Songs* or, more recently, CAConrad's *Book of Frank*. Robinson is the Keessian version of an "everyman," someone trapped in a dull, decaying society with no identifiable escape. In spite of the distance a third-person narrative brings to a character and his author, it is easy to identify that Kees shares a number of essential qualities with Robinson. These similarities inspire Rooney's collection. Employing Robinson as an avatar for Kees, Rooney both literally and figuratively collapses the distance between author and character to write Robinson poems of her own.

Rooney's novel of sorts is divided into three sections, each presenting Robinson as he lives through a different crucial period in Kees's life. Robinson is the product of rural Nebraska, and the novel begins its story with a lyrical naiveté appropriate to his small-town upbringing. In the collection's opener, "Robinson's Hometown," readers get a glimpse into the dreary world that swells around a young Robinson:

The corn bursting. The First Presbyterian

Church. The Institution for Feeble-Minded Youth. The football games

& the Buffalo Bill Street Parade
& Robinson acting in elementary

school plays: Sir Lancelot once,
& Pinocchio, obviously.



ROBINSON
ALONE



KATHLEEN ROONEY

The wordplay-laden verse moves along nicely until its lightness comes into direct contention with the despair of Robinson's early adulthood; but Rooney's move to continue with this lyricality, to couple Robinson's morosity with narratorial playfulness, is quickly rewarded. In "Out of Step with His Generation," Rooney opens with, "what can Robinson generate?" Similarly, "Robinson's Friends Take Him to a Western-Themed Bar" begins with the line, "though he's come from afar not to be near the West." The humor paints the dreary environments with a nearly insincere casualness; Rooney introduces a tension between tone and plot that allows for a miserable yet interesting conflict in the darker periods of the book. The funny and sad unite for an ultimately bitter take on the events that consume and mangle Robinson.

While *Robinson Alone* is structured around a very factual portrayal of the life of Kees, many liberties are taken in exploring Robinson's intimate thoughts and feelings. In "Robinson's Refrigerator," for instance, Rooney writes:

Robinson finds solace
in its small whirring
motor, plays god
with its bare interior
bulb—that always
full moon, that tiny sun.

Here, readers are given a knowledge of Robinson that likely exceeds what he himself grasps. The dedication to such essential minutiae begs for a more human understanding of Robinson, yet it does not complicate or obfuscate this work's functionality as a biography of Kees. Rooney is tactful in choosing which thoughts and feelings to expose and which to keep hidden. In "Robinson Walks Museum Mile," Rooney touches on Kees's real-life obsession with fame:

the ideal city building itself in his brain.
Is this mile magnificent? He's lived here

a while, but the mile feels unreal. Robinson's training himself to act blasé. Do museums

amuse him? Yes, but not today. Would he like to be in one? Of course. Why not?

An object of value with canvas wings,
an unchanging face in a gilt frame, arranged—

thoughtless, guilt-free, & preserved
for eternity. Robinson doesn't want to be

exceptional. He knows he is. He wants to be *perceived* exceptional.

In a way, Robinson's life is one not only of Kees but of all of the "suicide generation" poets; he's a self-conscious master afflicted with a desire for fame in an industry in which it is not easily awarded. Rooney maintains the impressive "everyman" dexterity of Robinson, even in her complete conflation of his life and the life of Kees.

The middle of this collection traces Kees's actual relocation to the East Coast, where he and his wife, Ann, lived in New York City and, later, summered at the artist colony in Provincetown,

Massachusetts. In "At a Thursday Night Party on a Boat in Provincetown," Rooney writes:

a piano rests beneath drinks
& stars. Guests mill at bars

above & belowdecks. Robinson
desires—& tires of—the semi-

constant public performance
required: the chronic flux

& seamy flaunt. A certain
sartorial raffishness.

Although the locales shift, Robinson's dissatisfaction remains the same. The collection is largely directed by Robinson's migration, though what exactly prompts it remains inexplicable; much remains unsaid. Readers are pushed, inevitably, toward the notion that for Robinson, no place is a fitting or satisfying home.

One of the standout features of this book—this collaboration, if you will—is Rooney's incorporation of fifteen centos, poems composed entirely of borrowed text. The pieces—all of which are titled "Robinson Sends a Letter to Someone"—are used as contextual segues between different periods in Rooney's Robinson poems. Composed of lines

from Kees's letters, reviews, and essays, the centos cleverly situate the book in biographical and historical information while offering a brilliant juxtaposition between Robinson's own thoughts and those given to him by Rooney. As the book draws to a close, "Robinson Sends a Letter to Someone (Cento XV)" offers an insight into Robinson's life that functions dually as a final word:

I must say that these days I am frequently assailed
with feelings that even efforts to produce art
are both heartbreaking & absurd.

But what else is there?

Because *Robinson Alone* stays true to Kees's biography, Robinson meets an ambiguous end. But the reader's reward is not in a sense of closure; it's in his or her capability to traverse the emotions of Robinson's last days and emerge with a better understanding of the way one's life impacts one's art. Rooney's latest collection proves that there is much left to be done with poetic hybridity, especially in conjunction with biography; *Robinson Alone* is perhaps one of the most compelling portraits of the life and work of Weldon Kees to date. ☀

CASSANDRA GILLIG is a poet and new media artist living in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Her chapbook *The Cantos* is forthcoming from NAP Press.

RECALCULATING

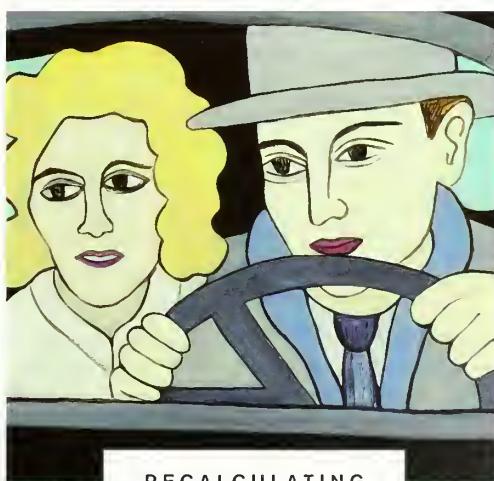
By Charles Bernstein

University of Chicago Press, 2013

A BOOK REVIEW BY JED RASULA

CHARLES BERNSTEIN HAS carved out a singular role in the public life of American poetry for thirty-some years. As an educator, he's effectively inspired and guided several generations of younger poets, whose debt to him has never taken on the characteristic obsequiousness that often prevails in such a relation. As a critic, he's been an astute gadfly of accepted opinion and sententious drivel, constantly inventive in his advocacy of actual poetic diversity—notably and often flamboyantly flying in the face of the accepted, brand-name "diversity" that holds court in universities. And, finally, his adventurous trajectory as a poet has revealed him as someone willing to try anything. "I'm an observant Jew," he puns. "I look closely at the things around me, as if they were foreign" (125). Bernstein is a fastidious observer of language above all. His most familiar tactics involve word substitutions, puns, diverting the transactional business of language to ends that can rapidly shift from ludic to ethical, sobering and boisterous in very short order. "If you are not part of the problem, you will be" (179).

Approaching a new book by a poet of Bernstein's eminence at this stage of his career and output, I wonder: What's new? and How does it build on the strengths of previous work? The first question is easy to answer, as *Recalculating* is



CHARLES BERNSTEIN

subtly but absorbingly drenched in the tragedy of personal loss, and this casts even the most impromptu and seemingly irreverent pieces in an unsettling ambience. The second question is easily answered as well, for Bernstein's penchant for trying anything and throwing in the pantry with the kitchen sink risks making this collection seem

more of the same—until, that is, the insistence of veiled lamentation makes itself heard. It's as if his previous books have all been played in C major, so the shift to the key of E is haunting despite the apparent continuity of prior methods. If there's a single component that announces the shift, it's the plentitude of translations (at least sixteen, by half a dozen poets), most of them carefully chosen for theme, it seems, yet each translated with a different procedure.

Beginning with the wonderful "Autopsygraphia" by Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa from 1931, and ending with a wistful croon, "Before You Go," *Recalculating* traverses 185 pages of nonstop inventiveness. The Pessoa poem serves notice of the black grief that lies ahead, though its cleverness strikes exactly the evasive note that Bernstein's own jauntiness often adopts:

Poets are fakers
Whose faking is so real
They even fake the pain
They truly feel (3)

Another poet, Gérard de Nerval, gives voice to the grief near the end of the collection in "Misfortune":

My morning star's dead and my disconsolate lute
Smashes in the blackened sun of torn alibi.
In the tomb of every night, memories of
Venetian reveries raw rub the inconsolable
Pitch of the dark, where over and again
I love you. (180)

"Misfortune" drastically contracts Nerval's sonnet "El Desdichado" into a direct personal lament. Phrases like "torn alibi" follow the sound rather than the sense of the original French (*la tour abolie*—ruined tower), as the poet gradually brings Venice into view (a city not in Nerval), where his daughter died in 2008. Using other poets' works as crutches for the expression of anguish might seem evasive but for the fact that it's one of the longest-running practices in the history of poetry. Bernstein is also capable of the most disarming unrehearsed direct address: "I was the luckiest father in the world / until I turned unluckiest" (158). That this

heartbreaking, heartbroken poem is preceded by the tender lament of Victor Hugo's "Tomorrow, dawn..." reinforces a sense of poetry as the site of ultimate sharing. A welcoming place, as *Recalculating* itself proves to be.

The personal loss so poignantly registered in some of the poems gathered here doesn't extend to the book as a whole, in part because it's so large, but also because the contents go back a decade, overlapping with *Girly Man* (2008), a poetry title, and *Attack of the Difficult Poems* (2011), a collection of essays. Like those and other works throughout his career, *Recalculating* is full of perceptual periscopes, furtively eyeing current events and taking the soundings. "Tea Party: I love America so much I want to lock her in my / basement to have her all to myself" (132). Some of Bernstein's work could be described as nonsense poetry for brainiacs. This poet has the fastest draw out of the verbal holster in the O.K. Corral. Like John Wayne in *Stagecoach*, Bernstein can bound from the driver's seat onto a galloping horse, then manage the lateral move onto the next horse. All this might happen from one line to another of a single poem, reaffirming his conviction that "whereas poetry never gets anywhere, it just makes you more present to where you are, or at least where you were when you were brushing up against it" (89). But the *it* in question never smacks of the familiar smug classroom icon: contra Keats, "A thing of beauty is annoyed forever" (4). For Bernstein, "off key...remains my motto" (89). "I always wanted,"

he elaborates, "to make poetry almost / painfully / clumsy, clumsy" (14).

Recalculating abounds with an almost reckless profusion of styles and attitudes, a traveling carnival of poetic antics. But there are deft tactics even where the jalopy seems to careen, reminders that while this big book may be homemade, and decked out with custom tailpipes and Day-Glo flames, it's got the hottest rods under the hood. The translations interspersed throughout—an approach that works better than segregating them—attest to careful design. The Baudelaire translations are especially fetching, ingenious and pungent as they should be. Even Apollinaire's old chestnut, "Le pont Mirabeau," is freshened up here. Another thematic arc related to the translations consists of poems in the idiom of, or answering back to, other poets ("Loneliness in Linden" after Stevens, "Pompeii" after Auden, "Stupid Men, Smart Choices" sampling, presumably, Garrison Keillor's "Guy Noir" radio episodes, "Armed Stasis" after Pound, "The Introvert" after Wordsworth, and "Chimera" after Yeats); these reinforce the aura of tradition that hangs over the collection as a whole, as well as bringing to the surface a spirit of comradeship. Such pieces sample the poetic mother lode as if it were amenable to sound bites in a desktop music program, "free-base tagging" (9).

The clusters of poetics ("The Truth in Pudding," "How Empty Is My Bread Pudding," "Manifest Aversions, Conceptual Conundrums, & Implausibly Deniable Links," and "Recalculating"—placed as they are at roughly equal distances throughout) are vital structural components, and they're also full of the quizzical, laconic, wry Bernstein wit that can turn on a dime into profundity. While many of the poems don masks of various sorts (has any poet since Pound been as conversant and at ease with *personae*?), in these ruminations the mask not only comes off but is often brazenly crunched and shredded, as if to drive home the moral that "So much of what we can't imagine we are forced to experience. And even then we can't imagine it" (175). Bernstein's *ars poetica* is courageously resistant to the blandishments of what he calls "personification" in its easy embrace of the unimaginable (172). This insistence makes all the more poignant and arresting, then, the abject misery of personal misfortune obliquely sheltered, honored, and given voice in *Recalculating*, a resounding collection by one of the true originals of the art. □

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JED RASULA is the Helen S. Lanier Distinguished Professor at the University of Georgia, author of numerous books including *The American Poetry Wax Museum: Reality Effects, 1940-1990* (1996), *This Compost: Ecological Imperatives in American Poetry* (2002), *Modernism and Poetic Inspiration: The Shadow Mouth* (2009), and most recently the anthology *Burning City: Poems of Metropolitan Modernity* (2012).

WHITE VESPA

By Kevin Oderman

Etruscan Press, 2012

A BOOK REVIEW BY SARAH EINSTEIN

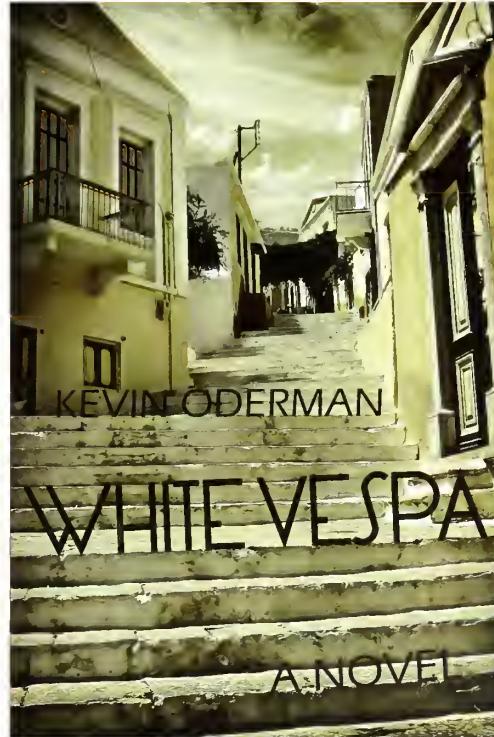
MYLES TOOMEY, THE protagonist of Kevin Oderman's excellent new novel, *White Vespa*, wants to change. He's shed his life in the United States—one gutted by loss—and returned to the Greek island of Sými to start a new life. A photographer working on a coffee-table book about the Lesser Dodecanese, Myles has himself been overtaken by a photograph he took the summer before. It's a photo of a man on the titular white Vespa, a man who "looks so sure of himself: free of all doubt, leaning into a curve, into the trajectory of his life, serenely confident." Myles moves back to Sými, buys the Vespa—not just one like it, but the actual Vespa of the photograph—and sets out to re-create himself as this imagined man. As the novel opens, however, Myles is already packing up to move on. He is a different man from the one who arrived at the island, but different, too, from the man in the photograph, the person he wanted to be.

The novel is constructed like a photo album; its short, dated chapters offer brief glimpses of Sými, Myles, and the other summer visitors to the island. Oderman brings his considerable skills as a travel writer to this work, and he captures images on the page as deftly as Myles captures them with his camera:

He'd been looking very intently, when a woman, a naked woman, flew from one building to the other, from right to left. She'd been mid-leap all the way across, or so it had seemed, arms raised, one knee up before her and the other leg, propelling her, taut out behind, head up, small breasts riding up, dark hair trailing.

These vivid flashes of Greece, of island life, of the sights and smells and tastes of the Lesser Dodecanese, draw the reader into the world of the book, the very small world of a summer island inhabited by tourists and circumscribed by the community that they make of themselves. With each small snapshot, a little more of the plot is revealed. At its heart, this novel is a love story, though not a romance. Rather, it's a more complicated story about what love—in all its manifestations—does both to us and for us.

Myles falls for Anne, a young American woman in Sými working as a cocktail waitress. This love reawakens Myles, pulls him out from behind his camera and back into the world, but the reader watches this happen with a certain dread: we know that Anne is on Sými not to run from her past, but to hunt it down. She's come to find her older brother Paul, as villainous a character as you're likely to find in a modern literary novel. There is nothing complicated about Paul—he is a predator, pure and simple—but his actions complicate the lives of everyone around him. The reader can't help but wish for Myles a



gentler, more nurturing sort of love than this. A love that isn't also hell-bent on revenge.

Luckily, Myles finds that other sort of love. Part of the genius of this book is that love appears where we've been taught not to look for it: in male friendship. Myles's connection with an American English professor, Jim, provides for many of the book's strongest moments of grace and tenderness. Jim's capacity for love, which is generous and given as freely in friendship as in romance, allows Oderman to tell an otherwise dark and melancholy story as, instead, a tale of hope and redemption.

It's possible, in fact, to read this work as a meditation on masculinity. In Paul, we are presented with the predatory potential of maleness that asserts itself through cruelty and brutality. In Jim, we are shown a different sort of manliness, one built on loyalty, tenderness, and strength. Paul wreaks havoc with the lives of the people who fall for his easy charm; Jim protects and nurtures those around him. And Myles, who spends most of the book just trying to get on his feet after suffering a horrible loss, reminds us that men, too, can be broken. That men, too, need love, and that they can be touched and healed by the love of other men. And this complicated triptych of men lets Oderman pull off a difficult literary maneuver: a book that examines the aftermath of some very gendered sorts of violence without being antimale.

White Vespa is a compelling novel about characters who have survived into middle age, with all the attendant wounds that entails. They had messy lives before they arrived on Sými and, in spite of Myles's best efforts for it to be otherwise, these lives get messier as they become intertwined. Messier, but more lovely. It's Jim who speaks the heart of this work when he says, "Somehow the burdens are common. We lift as much as we can, everyone as much as his heart can carry and no

more. Whose burden it is almost doesn't matter." Oderman's careful prose will, indeed, burden your heart. But not more than it can carry, and in a way that will make you feel lighter, more hopeful, once the novel releases you again. ☀

SARAH EINSTEIN is a PhD candidate at Ohio University in Creative Nonfiction. Her work has appeared in Ninth Letter, [PANK], Fringe, and other journals and has been awarded a Pushcart Prize. She is also the Managing Editor of Brevity Magazine.

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BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: STORIES FROM THE 1970S

By Catherine Gammon

lulu.com, 2012

A BOOK REVIEW BY R. D. SKILLINGS

WHAT STRUCK ME first about this book and has never ceased to hold my admiration is how unobtrusively but strongly it is written. Exacting, excruciating realism is *Beauty*'s mode, its initial focus the hippie lives of the Vietnam Era—heedless promiscuity, welfare ménages, drugs, lost children, psychic refugees, futile attempts to regain a wrecked equilibrium, a bereaved search for the rebirth of wonder, a mettlesome underclass amid the ever-accelerating consolidation of American power.

"Maggie and the Cyclist," in just six pages of tremendous compression, paints an unforgettable canvas of the teeming trajectory of one powerful woman's attracted tribe of drifters and spongers, kids, lovers, dogs, ex-husbands, and hangers-on under one disastrous roof of sporadic, exasperated violence, restless roamings and returns, habitués finally brain-dead of their own illusions.

In "Silence," a wistful child in a broken marriage, who learns that "happiness is not all there is to wish for, any more than love was," finds her addict mother dead in bed in her shit and vomit, and "knows that even with daddy she will be alone—no matter where . . . or with whom—she'll never find enough silence to hear one voice that really speaks to her."

Several of the stories are very short, shocking in their condensation and consequent force. In "Skinflick," the casual brings enduring catastrophe:

"Are you single tonight?" I said to him.

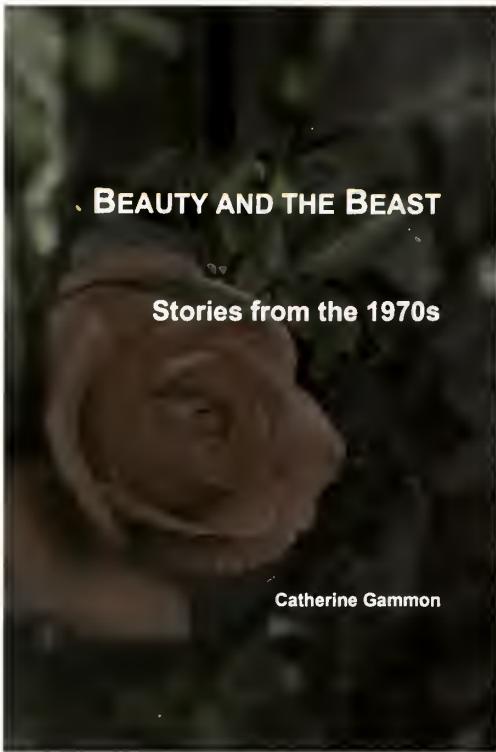
He grinned. "I'm always single," he said.

Within the year, she scars herself with a cigarette, vowing to God—God discovered to her own astonishment—"to concentrate the pain of love with the secrecy of un-lived sex," till in time "breaking the vow was harder than keeping it," something undreamt of. She dons her "whore's necklace" in the paradoxical pursuit of escape from her "willful deviation from the normal promiscuity." She's caught in the vale between free love and the knowledge that there is none, rising to the pathos of seeing his "inability to live love. And hers."

Tortures of love take perverse forms. In "Susanna Fasting," she aims to defeat faithless love by physical diminishment, laughing, laughing madly, refusing rescue by concerned Samaritans.

Gammon is master of the mundane. "A Chinese Divorce" chronicles the lost love of a graduate student, a welfare recipient beset by fears of the non-existent babysitter she didn't pay, her unreimbursed student loan—while typing papers on divorce for a China scholar, which pays too little.

Living past her ex, Diane wants to "scream, leap from the car, strangle him and beg for mercy,



all at once." She's so upset she drinks several beers in the tavern downstairs, thinking to bring the young, friendly bartender upstairs to her rooms at closing time. She can't forget how she'd waved to her former lover, how he'd waved back, blithely unaware of her misery.

She muses on China, where, before divorcing, a couple must be counseled. She imagines them conspiring to achieve a divorce. They had this loss of love in common. Perhaps it could save their affair.

Try as she will, she can't put her former lover from her mind, not for one moment. She feels "on the brink of something—vision, illumination. If she stands up it will break the spell." But nothing comes to mind, no hopes, no resolves, no escape. Amid onerous choices, staring at the display of Rolaids and Clorets, she can only suffer the reminder that "her former lover sometimes smoked cigars."

For all its rue, this is a tale of considerable complexity and charm, one aspect of the author's wry dolor.

"The Waitress" may be unique in fiction, a non-love story that purports to be about men, its first sentence, "When she was younger she played them for the tips."

Martha never decides not to marry, it's "just a pattern that hardens into fact, without her giving it much thought." She gets a job right out of high school, in a café where she becomes "as much a part of the place as the red vinyl booths and the gold formica counter-tops." She attends her widowed father, helps her sister through college, has minor loves, only one that makes her want to marry, but that one disappeared, never to return, consigned like the others to the past.

A new teacher comes to town. Amid her telling him about her high-school days, he says, "And you've never married?" She's stunned, doesn't

know how to answer. Something in his saying, "felt wrong, terribly wrong, as if she'd been insulted, more even than when some out-of-towner tried to grab her ass."

At her reaction he tries to smile. "I'm sorry," he says. "I shouldn't have asked . . ." But his apology can't undo the sense of insult, that there is something wrong about her life. She meets him again in a bar. He sits a long time, finally says slowly, only once, out of nowhere, "I am an unhappy man." She doesn't know what to say, he says it so simple and soft.

Another time the sad man sits down again with her, "softly, briefly touches her wrist, again says, 'Forgive me.'" She tries to laugh. "For what?" His eyes make her uneasy. She looks and looks and sees nothing. "Forgive me," he says finally, "I didn't know you didn't know." She can't imagine what he means, tells a friend, "It's made me unhappy knowing him."

Impossible to do justice to the eerie strangeness and power of this double sorrow. One feels, one wishes, fate could have allowed these two sad souls to escape themselves and merge. But that would not be real life, which is all Gammon trades in.

These are stories of commonplace extremity. Things learned only in the grief of folly, fatalities profoundly familiar that reach an eloquence of unbearable anguish, tears redeemed as diamonds in art.

On page 109 of 197, the book turns toward the public sphere and takes various forms, including "The Confession of Stephen Priest," an impressive literary construct, a brilliance of sheer style, tangles of paradox blent perhaps of Poe, Dostoyevsky, and Kierkegaard, a perverse rant at bland jailors bent on proving a sane wife-murderer mad against his own demand for due judgment.

Two of the last stories are, in opposite ways and complexities, like situations some diabolical genie of literary adventure had dreamt up and dared Gammon to make fiction of.

"The Spokesman" of an interminable crisis finds himself the "electronic me" the crisis has spawned, its servitor, for which he has been trained, throughout his career prepared, his television face with no control over content, only form, finally seeming its own incarnation of the crisis. The crisis itself is never divulged, only its titillation of nation and press, which track its every hint and twist as the months go by and he says nothing "in as baroque a syntax as possible." An old woman suddenly, astoundingly, appears center stage, her every relative dead in war, starting with her father in Vietnam, then husband in Libya, sons in Somalia and Kuwait; the ultimate subject turns out to be just this hysterical old crone, living on her widow's benefits in a tacky apartment in Tucson, drinking, smoking, watching TV, foregoing her Jack Daniel's, saving for vengeance. Her bullet harmlessly strikes the Spokesman's tie clasp, only imprinting his breastbone with the American eagle complete with clutch of arrows, herself ending locked away with the loonies as mad and sane as one who knows everything.

This is a bold tour de force, original, fearsome and true to things as they are in darkest essence, an apocalypse of spokesmen broken free in one voice, all howling bloody murder.

"Testimonies," an equal extravaganza, limns the tangled loves of six more-or-less casual, more-or-less intimate, vividly individualized, urbane friends in New York, in their thirties, or early forties.

Elizabeth, the main character, who "regarded sex as exploration, expansion of the mind," dies in a plane crash on page 1, leading to retrospects of ongoing moral and erotic philosophies and behavior, done with impeccable realism and variety, brilliant and adept, rich in range and depth. All drink, dance, romance, scheme, and dine together. In its way, this is supremely a writer's concatenation of distinct personalities with vivid notions of selves and each other. It does not weary or wear out, ends only with one's regret that it ends at all. I know of nothing like it.

Two stories, "Crazy Sammy" and "Dragons," both set in Provincetown, open with the lines: *This is a town where women wait and Town Hall looks in our bedroom window*. Both enact arduous, strung-out loves familiar to devotees of the turbulent P-town of earlier days.

This book and author warrant attention on a second count. Self-published, the book is a model

of professional quality—plain, pleasing, dignified, flawless. Such can be done, not without effort, to be sure, but formatting is provided, if wanted, and there need be no expense beyond the copies themselves. Simply go to lulu.com and click on "publish."

Once branded vanity publishing—before the disappearance or decay of the venerable houses devoted to high quality alone, the volume of literary works going a-begging, and contests, contests, contests, having crowded out hopes for more conventional means of acquiring print and readers—it now serves as a natural, saving resort.

But why no publisher would venture on this extraordinary book is one of those mysteries that grind teeth to dust.

Catherine Gammon was a Fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in 1977 and 1981, lived and worked year-round in Provincetown for about five years, was a mainstay of the writing side, edited five issues of *Shankpainter*, redesigned its format, got the magazine a \$5,000 grant from the NEA, and edited the Work Center Anthology with poet Bruce Smith in 1994.

She was Arts and Entertainment Editor of the *Provincetown Advocate*, typeset and wrote for it, took minutes for the Selectmen and Zoning Board of

Appeals, and, like generations of Fine Arts Work Center Fellows, cleaned apartments at the Bull Ring Wharf. A Soto Zen priest, she was ordained in the lineage of Shunryō Suzuki Roshi in 2005, and now divides her time between Green Gulch Farm Zen Center in California and Brooklyn, New York. A young grandmother, she is also the author of a novel, *Isabel Out of the Rain*, Mercury House, 1991.

A new novel called *Sorrow* will be published by Braddock Avenue Books in August, a new press, this to be its third imprint.

A life of literary transience has led Catherine Gammon to abodes in Pittsburgh and Brooklyn, thence to residencies at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts in Amherst, Virginia, and the Well-spring House in Ashfield, Massachusetts, while the Fine Arts Work Center hopes for a visit from her in the spring.

Beauty and the Beast deserves and should grandly reward a substantial readership. Order it at lulu.com. ☀

R. D. SKILLINGS is a Trustee and longtime Chair of the Writing Committee of the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. His eighth book, and fifth collection of stories, *Summer Nights*, will be published by Pressed Wafer in the spring.

THE TURNER EROTICA: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOVEL

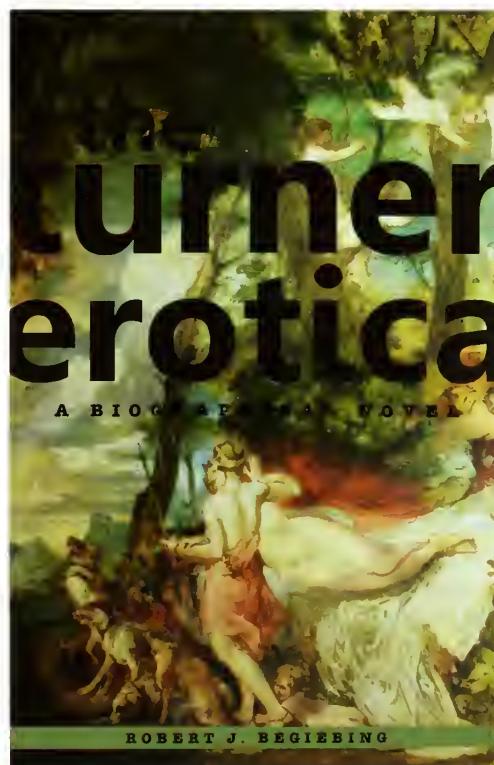
By Robert J. Begiebing

Ilium Press, 2013

A BOOK REVIEW BY CHRISTOPHER BUSA

WILLIAM JAMES STILLMAN, the narrator of this riveting historical novel, set in the turbulent contradictions of the Victorian era, offers a testament to his time, one he might himself have written if he had had the belated understanding of his posthumous biographer, Robert Begiebing, whose mastery of his voice brings the real-life man, and his fictional adventures, to life. Stillman's quest in the novel shines fresh light on a mysterious censorship: the alleged burning in 1858 by John Ruskin of erotic drawings created by J. M. W. Turner. This controversy drew the attention of the *New York Times*, reporting in a headline in 2005, "A Censorship Story Goes Up in Smoke." The piece cites an article by Ian Warrell, Turner curator at the Tate Britain museum, suggesting one interpretation of the evidence that might make us question whether Ruskin made a bonfire of the erotic sketches, as he declared, or helped sequester them for future preservation.

Whether or not some of the drawings were burned is less important than what happened to the many that survive in the collection at Tate Britain and are available for viewing on their website. The muted marks, as mysteriously shrouded as the artist's storm-tossed ships, substitute the solid for its existential aura. In 1857, the year



before the alleged conflagration, Britain passed the Obscene Publications Act, making it illegal to possess "pornographic" images. It is possible that Ruskin, rather than destroy the drawings, kept them concealed, since one portfolio was marked "kept as evidence of a failure of mind only."

The narrator is an odd duck. A person of modest distinction in his lifetime, considering the high circles he traveled in, Stillman lived

from 1828 to 1901, dying the year after Queen Victoria expired. The most enduring pleasure of reading a well-researched and factually accurate account of a culture in transition is to experience it through the emotions of an eyewitness. The year before Stillman passed away, Sigmund Freud published the era-defining *Interpretation of Dreams*, offering the inscrutable for cogent analysis. Begiebing's book brings belated wisdom to the conundrum that perplexes the narrator: what is the relation between sexual repression and creative expression?

The "Turner Erotica," the catalyst for events in this novel, are a cache of dubious sketches by J. M. W. Turner, discovered when his estate was inventoried, after he died, by the eminent art writer John Ruskin, Turner's staunch champion. Turner was revered in Britain for his way of painting ships in storms at sea, showing them as shimmering glimpses, almost without substance, and transforming modern painting in the way he created stomach-churning feeling in an abstraction.

The "secret" drawings showed couples in various phases of copulation. Turner, who never married, disappeared for periods when he visited brothels for observation. In drawing sessions Turner himself taught, he sometimes posed a live model beside a plaster mannequin so students could directly experience the difference. One unsolved issue concerns the definition of "erotic," since many drawings were made from life class studies at the Royal Academy.

Stillman lived an intercontinental life, serving as America's consul to Rome and Crete, reporting

on insurrections in Crete and Herzegovina for the London *Times* and European newspapers, and taking photographs of archaeological ruins, especially in Athens, now preserved in museum collections. He began his career aspiring to be an artist and traveled at an early age to England, where he met Ruskin, Turner, the Rossetti brothers, and other members of the Pre-Raphaelite group. Stillman returned to America for stints in which he associated with the Transcendentalists in Cambridge and Concord. He organized two summers camping in the Adirondacks with the top lights of the time, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, James Russell Lowell, William Cullen Bryant, and Louis Agassiz, who are pictured in a striking painting by Stillman, *Philosophers' Camp in the Adirondacks* (1858). While in America, Stillman founded the country's first art magazine, the *Crayon*, which survived six years.

Stillman writes in his two-volume *Autobiography of a Journalist*, which provides the structure for Begiebing's novel: "Given [my] disposition to enter into controversies on art questions, provoked by the general incompetence of the newspaper critics of the day, I easily made for myself a reputation in this field." Begiebing is scrupulous in his sources, and his fiction achieves the credibility of nonfiction.

For many years, Begiebing directed the Program in Creative Writing at Southern New Hampshire University. Recently he conducted summer workshops at the Mailer Center in

Provincetown. He is the author of a trilogy of novels set in seventeenth- through nineteenth-century New England, each centered on a female character: *The Strange Death of Mistress Coffin* (1991), *The Adventures of Allegra Fullerton* (1999), and *Rebecca Wentworth's Distraction* (2003). Allegra Fullerton is a fictitious composite of the itinerant artists, men and women, who, in their time, traveled shared circuits, providing patrons with painted likenesses before the widespread advent of photography.

Begiebing's new novel, set during the American Civil War, sends Ms. Fullerton to Europe, where she mixes with characters whose names are now part of our cultural memory, less real people than figures whose lives have become burnished legends: J. M. W. Turner, Sir Richard Francis Burton, and William and Gabriel Rossetti. Her invented presence in this historical novel blends seamlessly with and adheres closely to the actual doings of her real-life equivalents. Here, she also encounters the able journalist and aspiring artist William James Stillman.

This wily and multitalented American possesses in the novel a chronic sense of helplessness, entrapped as he becomes in an obsession to track down a bundled portion of a few of the estimated several dozen or so erotic figure studies. Once he's found them, Stillman dines in London with his old friend William Rossetti, and they debate the issue. Over cognacs, the conversation turns to Turner's bequest, in which Rossetti conferred with Ruskin about the importance or non-importance of the "secret" sketches to the "public" paintings.

Stillman scrutinizes the drawings as Rossetti, periodically, turns one over to reveal another. A drawing of two nude figures, embracing, elicits the description of a connoisseur: "The male figure's face was turned away from the viewer, the woman's hidden by the back of the male figure's head, which made his ears curiously reminiscent of a faun's, or perhaps those of a Silenus, as if for a classical theme." The mention of Silenus, mentor of Dionysus, the god of wine, becomes the sanction for absorbing debauchery into honored tradition.

Rossetti shows Stillman a final example, "an exceptionally obscure watercolor of two figures in the most common posture of recumbent copulation, perhaps in homage to Rembrandt's *The Bedstead*. However, Turner has washed the watercolor, leaving the figures simultaneously veiled and revealed in their capture in *flagrante delicto*."

Stillman asks Rossetti what he makes of the obscurity and Rossetti declares that it is a continuation of his "nature" studies, "possessing that search for sublimity through obscurity, or as Burke would have it, through 'uncertainty.'" Both the ambiguity of the meaning of the erotic drawings and the never-ending search to locate the actual drawings—the artwork changes hands several more times in the novel—conflate dual mysteries and provide angles of insight into questions seldom put together.

This book's counterbalance to Stillman's Ruskin-like suppression of sexuality is found in Sir Richard Burton, who comes into possession

of the secret sketches via Allegra Fullerton. He is a most fortunate choice, since he is indeed the most likely candidate to send Stillman the draft of an introduction to a book he agreed to write on the Turner erotic sketches. Burton, explorer of the source of the Nile, translator of the *Kama Sutra* and the *Arabian Nights*, an Orientalist fluent in thirty languages, is remarked on by Stillman for "his gargantuan appetites for exotic sexuality, cannabis, opium, and alcohol," asking "were he not the very opposite of Ruskin: The Englishman who rose about his nation's infatuation with propriety. Whose travels and education have led, rather, to largeness of mind and adventurousness of spirit, to the open pursuit of the darker obsessions of heterogeneous human culture."

While he is crossing on a ferry with his family on his first trip to Crete, the seas roughen. Stillman, seasick, clammers for fresh air on the deck, losing his hat to the "spume and spew." His life in danger, he thinks of Turner's "perilous study of storms and seas"—"his creation of vortices of water and unearthly light, foundering ships and overwhelmed humanity caught in avalanches, in deluges, in the convulsions of oceanic apocalypse." He recalls Turner's *Snow Storm—Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* (1842), the tossing vessel caught in a cyclonic tumble of searing illumination, with towering waves of dark menace.

Turner struggled to create forms that would express the feeling of being in a storm. He said he did not paint to be understood, but to show what such a scene is like: "I got the sailors to lash me to the mast to observe it; I was lashed for four hours and I did not expect to escape, but I found myself bound to record it if I did." Critics bruised his pride when their eyes saw only "soapsuds and whitewash" in this painting: "I wonder what they think the sea is like. I wish they'd been in it."

Just as *The Turner Erotica* begins with Stillman's imaginary "apparition" of the burning of the sketches, so the book concludes with Stillman's "frightening dream" that his wife, Marie, is modeling for Gabriel Rossetti, as she had done before they met, but in the dream "Marie had abandoned her satin robe and lay before him, hair in cascades, loins glistening, in an attitude of almost feral sensuality. I understood immediately that he had taken her away from me." This premonition is a palpable fear, prompting Stillman to return home from his foreign journeys. The narrator awakens from his time travel, where he had the persistent feeling "as if I were moving in some aqueous realm parallel to this one, but not quite of it."

Begiebing's artistry is all the more appealing for the ease with which *The Turner Erotica* makes what is long past feel as close as yesterday, bringing its people and their passions into a most compelling contemporary focus. As we are taken on an action-adventure across Britain, Europe, and the eastern United States, we are also, in a most entertaining way, invited on a literary and philosophical quest that challenges our perceptions of history and art. □

CHRISTOPHER BUSA is editor of Provincetown Arts.



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SACRED MONSTERS

By Edmund White

Magnus Books, 2012

A BOOK REVIEW BY MATTHEW B. BIEDLINGMAIER

"IT MIGHT SEEM paradoxical to write critical essays about personalities who are above or beyond criticism," Edmund White writes in the preface to his latest collection of essays, *Sacred Monsters*, "but I fall into the category of those cultural critics who appreciate more than they evaluate their subjects, who admire more than they judge."

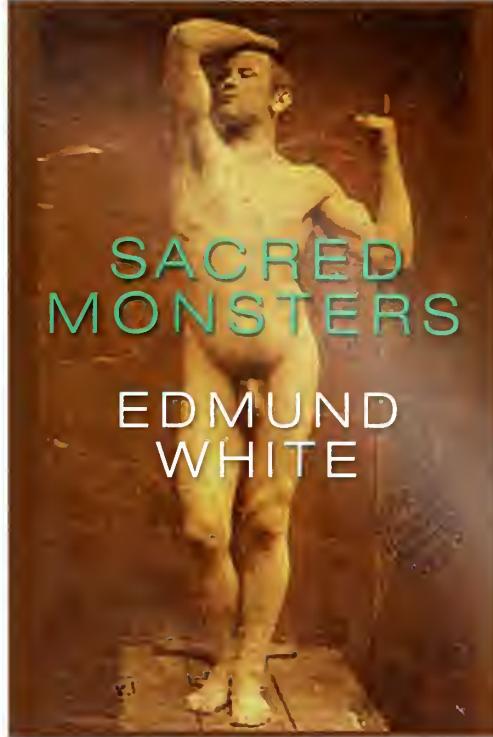
These subjects—including Edith Wharton, David Hockney, Truman Capote, Robert Mapplethorpe, Marcel Proust, and Tennessee Williams, to name a few—personify the *sacred monster*, a term derived from the French expression *monstre sacré*, often used to characterize, as White explains, "a venerable or popular celebrity so well known that he or she is above criticism, a legend who despite eccentricities or faults cannot be measured by ordinary standards."

Indeed, throughout the twenty-two essays that make up the collection, White doesn't judge his monsters. Instead, he paints pictures and tells stories, at times citing the work of critics, historians, writers, artists, and intellectuals, at others offering anecdotes from his own life.

In "The Bronze Age," the first essay in the collection, White reminisces about his time as a "lonely gay kid" in an all-boys school outside Detroit, where he huddled in the library and read novels and art books and found himself falling in love, not with a classmate or a teacher, but with a sculpture of a twenty-two-year-old Belgian soldier by Auguste Rodin. As White says, he fell in love with the statue "not as an art fancier or potential collector or historian, but the way a lover would." In "Sweating Mirrors," White recounts an afternoon spent with Truman Capote in Capote's New York City apartment, when the air outside was "yellow and poisonous" and the heat insufferable, and Capote's air-conditioning was "on the blink."

At other points in the collection, White takes a different approach. In "The House of Edith," he draws from Hermione Lee's magnificent biography, *Edith Wharton*, to illustrate Wharton as a smart, funny, larger-than-life, and occasionally "snobbish" "culture vulture," all the while praising Lee's ability to render the "dynamism and integrity of this sometimes remote and always willful and stoic woman without leaving out the nuances, the soft exceptions and endearing contradictions." As White notes, "Lee never reduces Wharton's books to veiled autobiography, just as she is never reluctant to interpret them in the light of Wharton's life."

In "Robert Mapplethorpe," White theorizes about the nature of objectification, in terms of both Mapplethorpe's work and photography as an art form. "I would contend that photography by its very nature objectifies," White writes. "A photograph is always one person's glance at another, and the model never speaks or in any



other way expresses his or her opinion about the results."

In many ways, *Sacred Monsters* represents the best of White. For those who are drawn to his autobiographical work (*A Boy's Own Story*; *The Beautiful Room Is Empty*; *The Farewell Symphony*; *City Boy*), or know him more as a biographer (*Genet: A Biography*; *Marcel Proust*; *Rimbaud: The Double Life of a Rebel*), or as a theoretical critic (*The Burning Library: Writings on Art, Politics, and Sexuality 1969–1993*; *Arts and Letters*), *Sacred Monsters* offers readers some of his most thoughtful and compelling writing in a variety of different forms. But what makes the collection so unique is the way in which these writings blend together, deftly, seamlessly, almost like a novel, with the skill of a master at the top of his game.

In reading *Sacred Monsters*, one can't help but think about how times have changed—how the art world has evolved, how writing has moved from the page to cyberspace, the nature of celebrity, privacy, and criticism. White's subjects represent very specific periods in history, with many of them having lived and worked during the two world wars, the Great Depression, the civil rights movement, the sexual revolution, and the birth of AIDS; but with the exceptions of David Hockney, Martin Amis, John Rechy, and Reynolds Price (who passed away in 2011), none of them experienced the most modern of revolutions: the conception and subsequent explosion of the Internet.

In "The House of Edith," White notes that Wharton destroyed all of the letters she received and pleaded with her correspondents to destroy those she had sent to them. Had it not been for her "caddish lover" Morton Fullerton, the only one who ignored her request and kept all of her private notes, the "passion" with which Wharton penned her letters would have remained merely speculation. It's hard to imagine a situation like

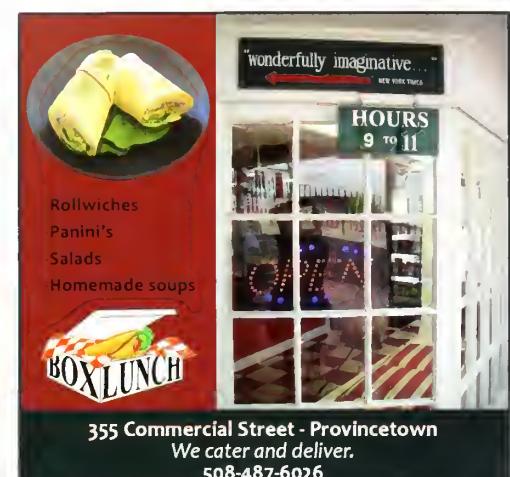
that today, in a world where celebrities confess their love, their fears, and their desires on Twitter; where the paparazzi capture every late-night tryst and illicit drug deal on camera; where the Kardashians romp around in flashy locales, shopping and screaming at each other and posing seductively for the always-present cameras, but otherwise don't do much of anything, at least nothing substantial or thought-provoking in any way.

The question then is: who are the modern *Sacred Monsters*? Are there venerable or popular celebrities in today's society who are so well known that they are above criticism? Legends who despite eccentricities or faults cannot be measured by ordinary standards? I pose this question to White on a bitter afternoon in mid-February, a few days after a brutal winter storm has crippled the Northeast, leaving many, including myself, stranded and unprepared.

"I think a 'sacred monster' is someone who's so famous he or she is invulnerable to criticism," White tells me. "I suppose Madonna is one, and, in high culture, Susan Sontag and Noam Chomsky are examples; no matter how severely they might be criticized, no one is going to forget their names."

In the end, *Sacred Monsters* is a window into White's world. We see him as a boy, lonely, dissecting his sexuality, devouring books and writing novels and falling in love. We see him later in life, as a professional, interviewing one of our country's truly great writers. We see him as a biographer, as a critic, as a cultural interpreter, and as a man. He's chosen his subjects carefully, all twenty-two of them, putting them together, one after another, in the context of a term, an idea, a vivid, expertly penned analysis of what it means to be a sacred monster. And while readers may have ideas of their own—celebrities not mentioned in the collection but who, in their minds, are above or beyond criticism—one of the great pleasures of reading White is allowing him to take your hand and lead you on a journey toward understanding and, above all, appreciation. □

MATTHEW B. BIEDLINGMAIER is the Founder and Editor in Chief of the New Professional, a literary magazine based in Washington, DC.



NAUTICAL TWILIGHT: THE STORY OF A CAPE COD FISHING FAMILY

By J. J. Dutra

• CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011
www.provincetownfishwife.com

A BOOK REVIEW BY PETER R. COOK

NAUTICAL TWILIGHT is the story of a Provincetown fishing family, taking us back to the time when the fishing industry flourished, and productive fishermen ("high-liners") were models for young men growing up in the community. The story also brings us forward to the present, a time when the ominous shadow of government regulations is placing the independent fisherman's way of life at risk. In 1968, over 15,353,000 estimated pounds of mixed fish stock was landed in Provincetown. With fish stock landings at around 100,000 pounds today, this seaport will likely never again see such great numbers, and fewer and fewer small fishermen will be able to make their living from the sea.

Judith Dutra, the author of this memoir, writes with firsthand knowledge of these changes, chronicling the experiences she and her husband, fisherman David Dutra, have had over forty years in the commercial fishing industry. They are the owners of the *Richard & Arnold*, one of only twelve working eastern-rigged fishing boats left on the entire East Coast, and their story gives us a portrait of the life of a working fisherman in Provincetown.

The Dutras met many years ago when Judy Dutra was working as a waitress at the Surf Club, a local bar where fishermen spend their downtime, especially during storms and bad weather. Little did she know when Dave came in to order a beer that this day would spark a lifetime of friendship, sharing, and love—something that's not so commonplace these days. The author made a decision to stay in Provincetown, where her husband had grown up, spending his life by the sea and around the alleyways, wharfs, and boats. Dutra later became a registered nurse and worked in the Provincetown and Truro Public School Systems, becoming an even more integral part of the community.

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JUDITH AND DAVID DUTRA PHOTO BY PEORO FARAI'S

In those early years, she learned a great deal about fishing and what it took to be a fisherman's wife:

I don't believe there is a school that can teach you to fish. If you have the incentive, the health, a little know-how, and the money, then, maybe, you will also have a certain gene that calls you to the sea. If you are not born with salt water in your veins, once you marry a fisherman, the process of osmosis begins.

I can only imagine the alarmed expression on Judy's face as David launched his first hand-built dory. The boat leaked from every seam and filled with seawater. David put his arm around Judy's shoulders and said, "Don't worry. The planks have got to swell. The wood is dry and the seams are open. Wait and see. She'll not leak a drop in a couple of days."

Fortunately, Judy had faith in David and the two persevered to build a business and a life together. The book's cover features a painting by a local artist, Steve Kennedy, of the *Richard & Arnold*, built in 1927 in Fairhaven, Massachusetts, by Casey Boat Building Company. She's fifty-two feet on the waterline and sixty feet overall with a beam of fifteen feet. She draws a seaworthy seven feet. In 1982, the Dutras celebrated their purchase with a Chinese meal. David's fortune cookie read: "You will succeed beyond your wildest dreams."

For over one hundred years there's been an abundance of fish for the boats that have fished from Provincetown, and fishing methods used here haven't changed much in the past eighty years. One of the great pleasures of reading this book is discovering the myriad commonplace—yet compelling—details of a fisherman's life, including the role of nets, which are a crucial tool:

A fisherman needs to know how to set the net for different species of fish. He needs to know the boat speed over the bottom, the weight of the doors, depth of the water, the direction of the tide, and the time of the year. Some of the knowledge of fishing can come from a book, but it takes experience to bring it together. Let's not forget the fact that fish have tails. They swim out of the way

when they feel the vibration of a net across the bottom or they are pushed in front of the mouth of the net, away from the wake of it, and they swim through the holes of the six-inch mesh. Not even one tenth of the fish in any given area are caught using our type of dragging. Perhaps this is why the dragger-men of Provincetown have been able to sustain their fishery for almost a hundred years.

While Dutra calls herself a "fair weather" fisherman, she has spent many days fishing alongside her husband, especially before the birth of their sons, Jackson and Robert. Her descriptions of shucking scallops with the crew are vivid:

Shucking sea scallops starts with a *plop-thunk*, as the first meat hits the empty stainless-steel bucket. Like aroma therapy there is a rich smell of earth and sea combined with the sweet scent of scallop. The abductor muscle is all that we save, so the sea gulls and small fish are fed well. I love the gulls and watch as they pirouette while flapping their big grey and white feathers. Their calls reverberate against the waves, as music from a Puccini opera, a single voice touching heaven.

With the consolidation of the fishery, many communities throughout the Northeast have lost whole fleets, businesses, and families. The writer has a broad knowledge of fishing regulations—which is needed when dealing with the complexity of so many government agencies layered in one place. Dutra makes it easy to see how one department will often have no idea what another may be doing. The National Marine Fisheries Service, she states, "is the agency that rules our lives." She provides delineations of numerous acronyms for every bureau on the state and federal levels: "The EEZ-LMA for NMFS—DAS branch of NOAA which has authority over NE Multispecies Permit Office of the DOC. Or the NE-FMRWRT." David's response to this maze of red tape? "When the government throws out another regulation, we'll adjust the set of our sails," he told Judy.

From my perspective, as the grandson of a Portuguese Provincetown fisherman—and having grown up in this fishing village and gone through Provincetown Vocational High School with many boys who fished on their families' fishing boats and went on to become fishermen, captains, and owners—I certainly sympathize with their dilemma in dealing with the tangled web of government bureaucracy.

While this story describes a disappearing way of life, in writing this memoir Dutra embraces and preserves a fishing family's traditions. This book belongs on the shelf with other classics of Provincetown history and culture. ▲

PETER R. COOK is a third-generation Provincetown native with ancestry from the Portuguese Azores. He is an accomplished photographer and filmmaker whose popular ninety-minute historical documentary, *Dad I Wanna Go Fishin'*, premiered at the 2012 Provincetown International Film Festival. He works full-time for the Town of Provincetown, and spends part of the summer months driving for Art's Dune Tours.

THE SEA AT TRURO

By Nancy Willard

Knopf, 2012

A Book Review by KEITH ALTHAUS

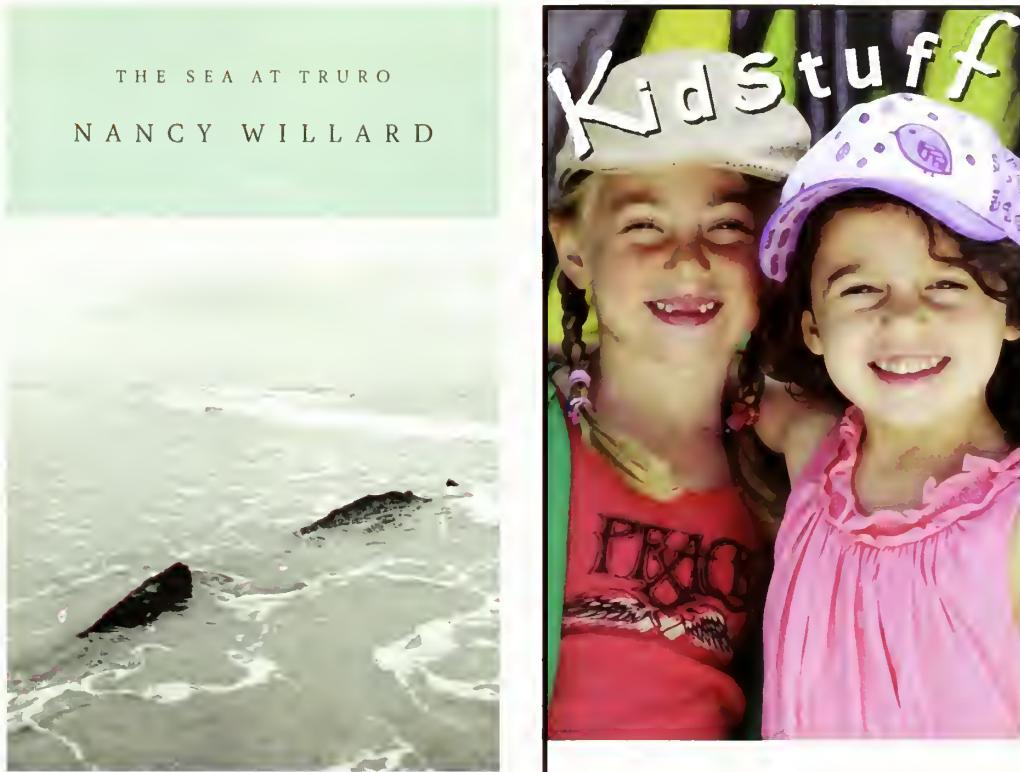
THE COVER, ALWAYS a good indicator of what's in a book, has a beautiful image of the sea, a photograph taken by Eric Lindblom, who has been indefatigably documenting the woods, marshes, and waters of Cape Cod for many years. It shows the ocean in an ordinary moment, of no high drama: no waves crashing, no breathtaking sunset, just two long lines of mild surf, countered diagonally by either rock or wood sticking out of the water, vaguely resembling the spine of a great fish, or one of those shipwrecks that periodically surface here, but nothing really threatening. In black and white, it's mostly gray; the sky has that washed-out look of clouds and glare of a summer day.

This plainness introduces Nancy Willard's new book of poems. Her work has been hounded for years by the word *magic*. The blurbs on her books always speak of her *enchanted* work, of *magical* images that well might cast a spell on you. These are efforts to pigeonhole her work, make it less important and more an entertainment, easier to dismiss. Categorizing things is just another form of divide and conquer.

There is no magic. Who knows that better than a magician, who bears the weight of knowing why there is no blood on the sword, or where the rabbit hides? Who wants to carry the secret that there is no secret? Only a few artists have tried to live in a miraculous world, the Surrealists notably, Breton in particular, usually with documented disastrous results. Yet the attempt may be admirable, even heroic.

If magic is an effort to transform the world, it is a critique of the world as it is, something to be improved by the wave of the wand, an incantation, a spell. Nancy Willard expresses no such views; in fact, she is very far from that. She gravitates toward, not away from, the world as it exists. Kitchen utensils and plain bowls, everyday objects of glass and wood, clay and stone, are more to her liking than the space-age materials and special effects that constitute today's version of magic. It is true that in this book there is an implied collaboration between man and nature, to which one doesn't have to subscribe to have the sense that feeling is manufactured not in the mind, a room, but by one who has lain down in the grass or the pathless cold earth and felt this link in the limbs and has thought about this a long time. You can't debate experience. Moreover what Berenson called *tactile values* are ever present.

What is not present is a powerful ego; this writer is less an activist in the world than one who is overhearing things, things spoken in private, not intended for broadcast. These are less studied and posed things than we are used to. They have very little of the glint and glare of the modern or the timely. They are not planned for this moment. They are more accidental, secret. Made out of moments not intended to become public.



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KEITH ALTHAUS lives in North Truro. He has published two books of poetry, *Rival Heavens* (Provincetown Arts Press) and *Ladder of Hours* (Ausable Press), and has curated two shows of the work of Mary Hackett, the most recent, her retrospective at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum in 2006.

CHARLES JENCKS

Theorizing Architectural Post-Modernism, Learning From the Outer Cape

By John R. DaSilva

HIDDEN DEEP IN Truro's National Seashore is a trio of Post-Modern buildings, including Garagia Rotunda—an off-the-shelf garage kit converted into a studio, replete with numerous shades of paint re-creating the white-to-blue color scale found in "Cape light" (the special quality of luminescent sunlight that attracts artists to the Outer Cape), a sun-shade mimicking an oculus in one board's thickness, and woodwork implying classical details but exaggerated or transformed into De Stijl-like compositions. Nearby are two additional creations: Cape Shack, a World War II surplus barracks repurposed as a cottage; and Face House, a bunkhouse with a classically anthropomorphic facade. These modest but symbolically rich buildings were designed by Charles A. Jencks, and he still lives in them today. In addition to designing houses for himself—as well as interiors, furniture, sculptures, and landscapes—he is widely considered one of the most influential theorists of Post-Modernism. For Jencks, architectural criticism is a portal to a wider world—a place to define, develop, and promote a contemporary worldview. His agenda, in the broadest terms, is to create an intellectual framework for the complexity of our world, to use the most tactile and public of arts—architecture—to illuminate the most ineffable of ideas: who we are and how we see ourselves.

≈

DEFINING POST-MODERNISM

With an ability to describe complex ideas clearly, Jencks is one of only a few who earn a living from architectural writing. His most famous book, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (1977), was, by its seventh edition, doubled in length and retitled *The New Paradigm in Architecture: The Language of Post-Modernism* (2002). This is an example of what Jencks calls "evolotomes," meaning that books on architecture, like architectural theory itself, should evolve over time. Jencks's writing is popular enough to receive such treatment. Just this year, MIT Press issued an expanded edition of his counterculture manifesto *Adhocism: The Case for*

Improvisation (1972). "Adhocism" (another word Jencks invented) greatly influenced Post-Modernism and is now dictionary-defined as "*the tendency to establish temporary, chiefly improvisational policies and procedures to deal with specific problems and tasks.*" While Jencks did not invent the term "Post-Modernism," he associated it with concrete reality and brought it into popular use. Previously, it had been undefined for architecture and mostly used in literary theory. Although he has refined the definition over the years, the inclusive ideas of pluralism (in which commonality and individuality supportively coexist) and multivalence (in which layers of multiple meanings coexist) have remained critical.



GARAGIA ROTUNDA, TRURO, 1976–77: THE SHELL WAS A LOCAL PREFAB GARAGE, THE ROTUNDA A ONE-INCH CIRCULAR CURVE, COLLAGED AD HOC WITH OTHER PROPORTIONED ELEMENTS, INCLUDING ELEVEN MASS-PRODUCED DOORS, ALL PAINTED IN TEN SHADES OF BLUE.

(LEFT) A PORTION OF GARAGIA ROTUNDA WITH ITS AD HOC USE OF MASS-PRODUCED SCREEN DOORS AND BALUSTERS, DE STIJL-LIKE COMPOSITION, AND NUMEROUS SHADES OF "CAPE LIGHT" BLUE. AN IMPORTANT POST-MODERN DESIGN, RE-CREATED IN THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON, 2011.

(ABOVE) LOOKING DOWN FROM THE WIDOW'S WALK OF GARAGIA ROTUNDA AT THE "ROTUNDA" DECK STRUCTURE AND THE SEASHORE WOODS. PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHARLES JENCKS

Jencks stressed the importance of pluralism and multivalence in *Post-Modernism: The New Classicism in Art and Architecture* (1987), in which he defines the Post-Modern condition to include the paradoxical hybrids *dissonant beauty* and *disharmonious harmony* and claims these are justified by pluralism—"the mixing of different languages to engage different taste cultures and define different functions according to their appropriate mood." Engagement of the viewer is critical to pluralism in architecture: "When several possible meanings are presented simultaneously, it is left to the reader to supply the unifying text." He goes on to state that when multiple codes are used coherently toward a specific end they produce *multivalence*. A univalent building "can have integrity but only of an exclusive and generally self-referential type. By contrast, a multivalent work reaches out to the rest of the environment, to many adjacent references and to many different associations." He concludes: "The great advantage and delight of multivalence is the continual reinterpretation it prompts, a result of the multiple links between the work and its setting." For his edition of *What is Post-Modernism?* of the same year, he wrote a broad and encompassing definition of Post-Modernism based on these central ideas:

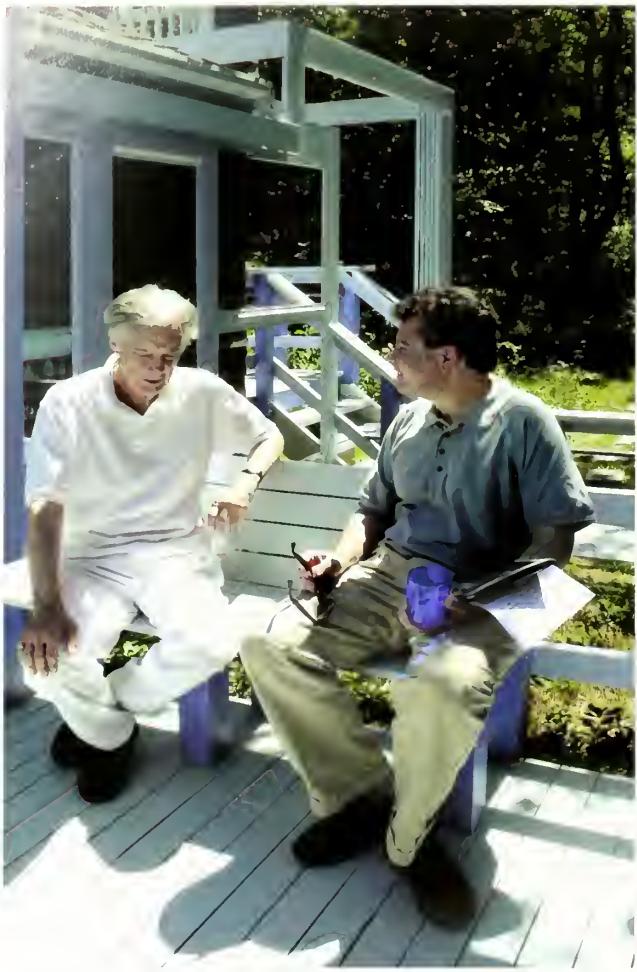
Post-Modernism is fundamentally the eclectic mixture of any tradition with that of the immediate past: it is both the continuation of Modernism and its transcendence. Its best works are characteristically doubly-coded and ironic, making a feature of the wide choice, conflict and discontinuity of traditions, because this heterogeneity most clearly captures our pluralism. Its hybrid style is opposed to the minimalism of late-Modern ideology and all revivals which are based on an exclusive dogma or taste.

An important distinction Jencks made was to capitalize and hyphenate "Post-Modern," rather than use the more common "postmodern," because he felt it transcends the root meaning (after "modern") and implies a hybrid of Modernism and something other than Modernism. The latter is intentionally ambiguous—open for pluralistic inclusivity. In *Le Corbusier and the Continual Revolution in Architecture* (2000) he emphatically clarified:

The basic insight of Post-Modernism, that multimeaning is an end in itself but also one that allows different groups and individuals from various backgrounds to interpret it, is the relevant

point for architecture. As a public symbolic form it must mediate all kinds of opposite tastes and meanings.

Jencks began investigating pluralism in architecture and multivalence within individual works during work on his doctoral thesis in the late 1960s, and the promotion and integration of these two themes have remained important in virtually all of his writing. He has argued for the multiplicity of self-determination rather than the totalitarian monoculturalism of Modernism; made pleas for architects to master referential languages and symbolism accessible to nonprofessionals; found diversity in "Free-Style" transformation of the classical language, rather than in proper "Canonic" use of the language; taken support from nonlinear sciences and metaphysical ideas, such as cosmogenesis, fractals, Complexity Theory, biomorphism, and "Gaia" (based on the Greek goddess "Mother Earth," indicating the Earth as self-regulating and organism-like); identified "enigmatic signifiers" (intentional or unintentional multiple meanings) as critical to iconic buildings; explored metaphors—the "magical risk-taking," as he calls it, of transferring meaning from one idea



CHARLES JENCKS AND JOHN DASILVA AT THE GARAGIA ROTUNDA, AUGUST 2012

PHOTO COURTESY OF POLHEMUS SAVERY DASILVA ARCHITECTS BUILDERS

or object to another; and considered spiritual and ethical implications of inclusivity over exclusivity.

He has produced monographs on his own design work (always illustrative of the ideas described in his polemical writing) and has written books on several specific architects, including Le Corbusier (architect of Harvard's Carpenter Center, 1963). Jencks considers Corbusier's late phase to be proto-Post-Modernist, and argues that his Ronchamp Chapel (1950–55) is the first Post-Modern building. Jencks also wrote *The Architecture of Hope: Maggie's Cancer Caring Centres* (2010), in which he argues that architecture cannot determine well-being but must play a supporting role, as exemplified by Maggie's Centres, a rapidly expanding organization he founded with his late wife, Maggie Keswick Jencks (1941–95), when they discovered there were few places for life-enhancing care when she was stricken with cancer.

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FAMILY LIFE AND BACKGROUND; HOUSES

Charles was born in Baltimore in 1939 to Gardner Platt Jencks, a musician and composer, and Ruth Pearl Jencks, a biologist and painter. He attended Harvard for college (BA in English Literature, 1961) and graduate school (BA and MA in Architecture, 1965). His first name and middle initial came from his great uncle, architect Charles Adams Platt. Jencks wrote the foreword

to a 1985 book reintroducing Platt to an audience once again interested in classicism after criticism of Modernism had taken hold. Charles's sister, sculptor Penelope Jencks, still lives in the family home on Bound Brook Island in Wellfleet, designed in the Platt manner by their uncle, architect Francis H. Jencks, and built in the year of Charles's birth. Charles speaks lovingly of the house and Platt's exquisite but understated classicism.

Jencks continues to return to the Outer Cape every summer. He recharges his creative energy and reengages with spectacular natural context in and around modest structures whose "adhocist," symbol-rich designs make them important examples of Post-Modern architecture. For the 2011 exhibition *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970–1990* at the Victoria and Albert Museum, a portion of Garagia Rotunda was re-created. It was also featured in a Provincetown Art Association and Museum exhibition in 2006, *Chain of Events: Marcel Breuer to Charles Jencks, Modernist Architecture on the Outer Cape*—a curious choice

since Jencks's career has been dedicated to overcoming the alienating abstraction of Modernism. Materials and form are in the service of overt symbolism in his buildings, something that is anathema to Modernists, who generally suppress symbolism and believe in "truthful" use of form and materials.

The Jencks family home was not far from that of writers Edmund Wilson and Mary McCarthy, and, even after the end of Wilson and McCarthy's tumultuous marriage, the families were close. McCarthy's novel *A Charmed Life* (1955) surreptitiously reflected Wellfleet and specifically included the Jenckses. McCarthy had an infectious smile and great sex appeal ("a black-haired Grace Kelly," says Charles), but could be reckless with her sharp wit. Unflattering portrayals in the novel, identifiable as real people, cost her many Wellfleet friends. The loyal and forgiving Jencks family, however, remained close. Charles became good friends with Edmund and Mary's son Reuel Wilson, and they attended boarding school and college together. The Jencks family is mentioned several times in *The Forties, The Fifties, and The Sixties*, Edmund Wilson's memoirs; in *Seeing Mary Plain: A Life of Mary McCarthy*, the biography by Frances Kiernan (2002) for which Charles was interviewed; and in *To the Life of the Silver Harbor: Edmund Wilson and Mary McCarthy on Cape Cod* (2008), Reuel's memoir.

Reuel recounts how the Jenckses were the most stable of the Outer Cape bohemians and reliable friends of his parents even after their acrimonious divorce. Gardner Jencks was upbeat and outgoing

but had a serious attitude toward his harmony-less music and philosophical thinking; he alternated between the isolation of his monastic studio and parties on the beach below. Ruth Jencks was loving and cheerful, with, in Reuel's words, "zany energy" mostly concentrated on her children, and "daffy eccentricity" mostly concentrated on her own bohemian dress. After her children were grown, her energy shifted to landscape painting inspired by the extraordinary Cape light as captured by their friend, painter Edwin Dickinson. Some of Ruth's paintings still occupy the stud-bays in Cape Shack, along with paintings by Cape friends such as Paul Resika. Charles's broad interest in arts and sciences follows from the influence of his parents and their artistic and intellectual circle.

The family operated smoothly, although the household sometimes didn't, as housekeeping was not a priority. The well-off couple was generous, took pride in their broad social connections, and were frequent entertainers. They welcomed children as equals in passionate conversations. Unlike some others in their circle, they drank moderately, were deeply concerned for friends' well-being, and maintained relatively traditional but non-suffocating care for their children. Art historian Hayden Herrera grew up with Charles and Penelope. Her essay *Penelope Jencks' Figures on the Beach* introduced the sculptor's over-life-size figures based on a child's view of real adult bodies—their parents—nude at Outer Cape beaches. Herrera describes the close group as "like a tribe" and remarks how the older generation did not impose identity on the younger, except for "the importance of beauty. They were constantly pointing out the shapes of clouds, the light on the ocean, the late afternoon sun on the beach grass. They thought it was good and pleasurable to be close to nature."

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MORE CAPE INTELLECTUALS; POLITICS

The Outer Cape of Jencks's youth had a great concentration of artists and intellectuals. In addition to gathering for skinny-dipping, talking, eating, drinking, and pursuing one another romantically, several got together weekly to play baseball. The "Sunday Team" was, in Charles's words, "the highest-IQ baseball team in world history." Norman Mailer played third base. Cy Rembar, attorney to writers and publishers (especially those—like Mailer—prone to getting in trouble), played shortstop. Edmund Wilson's weight made running challenging, so he played pinch hitter. *New Yorker* critic Dwight Macdonald was on the team and, according to Jencks, was "a terrible right fielder, playing with a long cigarette holder, very suave and grand." Novelist Edwin O'Connor also played. From this erudite group, Jencks learned to play ball, but they also inspired him to master intellectual skills—to formulate and argue points, to deeply analyze cultural and creative issues, and to write. Reuel recounts how, when his father asked the sixteen-year-old Charles about his calling for the future, Jencks confidently answered "a writer."



JENCKS HAS WRITTEN OR BEEN FEATURED IN DOZENS OF BOOKS. SEVERAL ARE SHOWN HERE, IN DESCENDING CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER, LEFT TO RIGHT, 2011 TO 1969. PHOTO BY JOHN DASILVA

The Jencks family circle included several architects. Serge Chermayeff was a close friend, and Charles became friends with sons Ivan, an artist and graphic designer, and Peter, an architect like his father. Marcel Breuer, architect of the Whitney Museum, summered in Wellfleet and was subject to interviews for Jencks's early-career research on Modernism. Charles taught architect Eero Saarinen's wife, Aline, to drive. Architect and designer Jack Hall received special concern from ever-compassionate Ruth Jencks when his wife left him and he took up drinking. Jack Phillips, another Harvard College graduate, spent a year at Harvard Graduate School of Design studying under Breuer. Phillips inherited eight hundred acres in Wellfleet and Truro and sold lots to Breuer, Chermayeff, and other European architect émigrés. He brought five small surplus World War II barracks to his property and turned them into homes for historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and others. Charles Jencks's own Cape Shack began as one of these barracks.

Schlesinger, a friend of the Kennedy brothers who worked in the Kennedy cabinet, was a special friend to Ruth and Gardner. The couple became so excited, in the words of Reuel Wilson, "to breathe the *zeitgeist*" of the Camelot era, that they moved to Washington, DC. Despite his criticism of many Post-Modern thinkers, dissident intellectual Noam Chomsky is Charles's friend and neighbor. Chomsky and Jencks continue in the tradition of Wellfleet Leftists, with a deep commitment to questioning authority. When I interviewed Jencks, he had recently visited Chomsky and passionately recounted their conversation. While Jencks praised Americans for open-minded creativity, he blasted an American foreign policy based on a military/industrial establishment in which, given a war mentality, "you brutalize your own population as well. You treat foreign questions that go against your self-interest as ones of terrorism and exceptionalism. Obama is the most recent example when he uses drones for extrajudicial murder."

Jencks went on to discuss the "paranoia streak" in American politics that another Wellfleet Leftist

of his youth, Richard Hofstadter, identified, a political agenda of which Cape intellectuals were sometimes victims and which is manifest today in the gun lobby. "We owe it to America," he concluded, "to fight against this destructive streak." Jencks has included strong political criticisms in writing as well. From *The Architecture of the Jumping Universe: A Polemic: How Complexity Science Is Changing Architecture and Culture* (1995): "The Anglo-Saxons were the first to recognize that education pays dividends . . . and then, under Thatcher and Reagan, were the first to de-skill, de-educate, and 'dumb down.'" Even in his built work, Jencks displays political philosophy. The entry mural in the London home he designed for himself depicts his open-minded, antitotalitarian heroes: Hadrian, Erasmus, Jefferson, and Arendt.



SEX, SEXUALITY, GENDER, AND BODY ISSUES IN DESIGN

Outer Cape liberalism of the '40s-'60s carried into sexuality and body issues, and here, too, Charles continues to argue passionately for diversity and acceptance. He writes eloquently about architecture in terms of gender and derides the "PoMo" abbreviation of Post-Modernism when it is used to imply a slur mirroring "homo." In *The Story of Post-Modernism: Five Decades of the Ironic, Iconic and Critical in Architecture* (2011), Jencks recounts an attack on his friend Charles Moore, architect of Piazza d'Italia, which was constructed in the late '70s and featured on the cover of the 1981 edition of *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*.

Jencks analyzed this scenographic plaza, an extravaganza approaching kitsch, as a radically eclectic harbinger of multiple coding including high- and low-taste cultures. Moore had a gentle personality, was a prolific designer and educator, and was gay. His work was based on serious intent but was ironic, playful, witty, full of historical quotation and many other things

antithetical to Modernism. The attack, from the head of the Modernist firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) at a 1979 conference, abused Moore for "effeminate" and "corrupt" work. It provoked Jencks's defense based on "the importance of hermaphroditic architecture." He went on: "It may not be necessary for humans to have the attributes of both sexes, but a building which has to serve the whole population has to appeal to the two extremes and all the shades between." In our discussion, Jencks took this story further, pointing out the seriousness of intolerant rhetoric around the time of the assassination of Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in California. Jencks drew a parallel between the struggle for gay rights and the struggle to shed Modernism. The SOM leader's diatribe was a part of the Modernist stand against the increasing popularity of Post-Modernism, and it arrived along with the use of "PoMo" as a homophobic slur.

The body in art and design has been significant to Jencks throughout his career. The Outer Cape of his youth was, in its landform and natural context, a sensual place. In a quote included in *Penelope Jencks: Sculpture*, a 2006 exhibition catalogue, Penelope Jencks, who strikingly captures the human body in her work, talks about Wellfleet: "The shape of the land, with its curves and dips, were like the forms of a large human body. As children it was as though we lived on a big shapely body that we could walk on, dig in, and pick flowers from." Openness about the body and sexual freedom were endemic to the intellectuals at the time of Jencks's youth on the Cape. Wilson and McCarthy flaunted their infidelity, although the loving descriptions Wilson wrote of sex with McCarthy are frankly erotic and beautiful.

In *Post-Modernism: The New Classicism in Art and Architecture* (1987), Jencks analyzed more than 150 artworks, and nearly 60 percent depicted nudes. In 1968 he made a sensual anthropomorphic table by combining mannequin parts and a marble slab. In a similar ad hoc vein, artist Allen Jones went into the erotic by transforming life-size fiberglass figures, positioned for sex, into furniture. Jencks explored the erotic in art in his 1993 essay on Jones: "Sexual matters permeate every area of discourse . . . only artists, finally, can deal with the ambiguities and overlapping pleasures this creates." In *Ecstatic Architecture—The Surprising Link* (1999), Jencks extended this exploration to architecture. Bringing together notions of body and out-of-body experiences, his concern was for architecture with intentions to "overwhelm, stupefy and seduce." Expanding traditional anthropomorphism into metaphors of the erotic, he described one firm's work as "the build-up to fulfillment rather than the afterglow of Saint Teresa's swoon" and concluded: "Disjunctive, cataclysmic, even orgasmic architecture is thinkable in this context."

More recently, Jencks has taken sensual, anthropomorphic design to a colossal scale. *Northumberlandia* (2012) is a quarter-mile-long landform in the shape of a reclining goddess made ad hoc of coal-mine spoils. The contoured body has four miles of footpaths, culminating in a



COSMOGENESIS IN THE GARDEN OF COSMIC SPECULATION, 2002, INSTALLATION OF THREE UNIVERSES CENTERING ON THE UNIVERSE CASCADE THAT PRESENTS THE UNFOLDING STORY OVER 13.7 BILLION YEARS. PHOTO COURTESY OF CHARLES JENCKS

forehead and breasts one hundred feet off the original ground plane. Here, Jencks literally applied the land-as-body metaphor that his sister, as quoted above, so eloquently described as applying to the Outer Cape. In *The Universe in the Landscape: Landforms* by Charles Jencks (2011), Jencks wrote:

As Degas put the question, rhetorically: "We were created to look at one another, weren't we?" The body in the landscape plays a continuous and major role throughout history because people unconsciously project their own mood and shapes in to living nature.

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COSMIC LANDSCAPE AND KITSCH

Since 1988, when he and his late wife began to design his own thirty-acre *Garden of Cosmic Speculation* in Scotland, the design side of Jencks's career has been passionately focused on landscape. In 1978 he contributed to Keswick's book *The Chinese Garden: History, Art and Architecture* and developed the idea that traditional Chinese gardens attempt to symbolize in microcosm the universe as a whole—an idea critical to Jencks's subsequent work. He wrote *The Garden of Cosmic Speculation* (2003) to describe the garden and his goal of finding concrete ways to depict abstract ideas of contemporary science: from the structure of DNA to that of black holes, from the science of fractals to cosmogenesis. The search for meaning in the universe as explored in the *Garden* inspired the

creation of a major symphony by Boston composer Michael Gandolfi—a fitting tribute for the son of a composer.

While Jencks's success with landscape has greatly expanded his design scope, there have been detractors. Some critics consider *Northumberlandia* to be kitsch. Jencks disagrees, but is not offended. He is willing to approach kitsch in the visual realm in order to make the intellectual realm intelligible. In his own garden, a bust sprouts wires representing nerve impulses, and a cast-metal ear hangs within DNA-strand wind chimes—constructs in the service of turning metaphors of ideas into tactile realities. Like Piazza d'Italia, they verge on kitsch in order to transcend it. In recent correspondence between Jencks and me, he commented on critics who see kitsch in his work:

Every time they see a recognizable element they reach for their *kitschometer* to avoid thinking. The multivalence I have coded into *Northumberlandia* or other work grounds the body and face meanings in other matrices of perception. This is one reason it is not kitsch.

Jencks has found redeeming qualities in architecture that many dismiss as kitsch. He praises architect Bruce Goff, whose bizarre, surrealistic designs make less fearless intellectuals cringe because of elements like actual bird feathers as finish material or Woolworth plates as ornament. Although few consider Goff a Post-Modernist (actually, few consider him at all), Jencks has, over time, used Goff's work to illustrate his own developing ideas of Post-Modernism. He has shown how Goff's semantic codes equal the "delightful heterogeneity and complexity of modern life" (*Adhocism*, 1972), identified pluralistic merging of vernacular and high art, and shown his buildings to have "history, time and place . . . literally built into them" (*Architecture Today*, 1982). In the late 1970s, when serious architects such as Charles Moore found inspiration in the mass-market success of Disneyland and Las Vegas, Jencks expounded that "these experts of the *démodé* can't begin to reach the nightmarish beauty of Goff's work because their heart and taste culture aren't in it. This is the poetry of the unredeemable, the rescue of ersatz, the Michelangelo of kitsch" (*Architectural Design Profiles 16: Bruce Goff*, 1978).

In the mid-1990s, Jencks moved beyond the material realm to focus on Goff's self-similar geometry of fractals versus the self-same repetition of traditional geometry. Fractals are systems that are similar rather than identical, in all parts and at all scales. A tree, for example, displays the same general characteristics in its roots, leaves, branches, trunk, and entire structure, whether seen from afar or under a microscope. Jencks wrote: "Self-similarity is positive whereas self-sameness, monotony—the monothematatis of Modernism—is boring. So is complete dissimilarity, chaos" (*Architecture of the Jumping Universe*, 1995). Goff strikes the correct balance, right at the edge of chaos—where Jencks believes all great works should be.

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RELATIVISM, COMPLEXITY, AND BEAUTY

Unlike most theorists, Jencks straddles the line between the esoteric and the accessible, leaving himself open to criticism from the academy while at the same time remaining popular with the public. While his topics are serious, his writing can be humorous and ironic. When I was an architecture student at Princeton in the early 1980s, an interest in Jencks was a guilty pleasure you hid from certain professors (one published a contemptuous article including a picture of Jencks's head exploding—and later apologized). Jencks is a populist who sees the pluralism of Post-Modernism as a way to overcome elitism—he insists architecture be double-coded to satisfy both the elite and the common man. Yet some are suspicious of double-coding and believe Post-Modernism is just as elitist as Modernism. Jencks has been criticized as being too permissive, taking seriously such a broad spectrum of work as to tip into relativism. Yet he is clearly not a relativist. His pluralism and multivalence are not "anything goes," but more "anything is possible." He works hard to describe buildings that are right or wrong and to develop theories of right and wrong that, recently, borrow from Complexity Theory.

In one essay in which he takes up this task, "God, the Architect of the Universe—Universe, the Architect of God" (2010), he argues that the highest value in any system, including a work of architecture, is achieved by the greatest number of links between elements, the greatest depth of organization, the tightest hugging of the edge between order and chaos. Where the complex exists, rather than the simplistic or complicated, that which is more positive, valuable, or beautiful emerges. Pluralism remains strong in this view because it reflects a wonderfully complex world. He also believes beauty is more than subjective perception. He has developed a theory of objective beauty based on principles that interact as "strange attractors" (using a scientific term to describe coherence and variation in systems, like the weather, bounded by limits but oscillating within them). The four principles—patterns of patterns, new ways of experiencing, symbols of perfection, and significant content—allow for differences in culture, belief systems, and taste, but don't depend on them as in relativism. The beauty Herrera mentioned as so important to the generation on the Outer Cape that included Jencks's parents has here been given deep intellectual basis.

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ECLIPSE AND THEN RETURN OF POST-MODERNISM

Although Modernist belief in determinism and reductivism—that a spirit of the age dominates and can be reduced to universally appropriate design—is something Jencks argues against, completely shedding the notion is difficult for anyone

educated in architecture during the twentieth century. In *The Architecture of the Jumping Universe*, he writes as if a similarly universal alternative to Modernism is possible: "History has chosen this word [postmodernism] because it typifies our transitory place of posterity after Modernity and before a clear alternative has emerged." Perhaps in the mid-'90s, when admiration for Post-Modernism was low in academic circles, pluralism would not have held up as a "clear alternative."

While still committed to pluralism and multivalence, and not seeking a common style in architecture, Jencks was seeking a common narrative for our era—the representation of cosmogenesis, "the idea that the universe is a single, unfolding, self-organizing event, something more like an animal than a machine, something radically interconnected and creative, an entity that jumps suddenly to higher levels of organization and delights us as it does so." Sixteen years later, while still embracing cosmogenic architecture within a "big-tent" of Post-Modernism, Jencks could rejoice in apparent return to wide acceptance of his earlier ideals. In *The Story of Post-Modernism* (2011), he states: "Many of the post-modern concerns of the 1970's and 1980's have become central to society. Most importantly, pluralism has been accepted as the global order of cultures."

If there is any truth in the criticism of Jencks's work, it pales in comparison to the difference he has made. Architecture is the most visible of arts

and his forty-five years of constant publishing, public speaking, teaching, and designing has given broad exposure to—and clarified the meaning of—the rich and fluid architectural ideas of our times. In looking closely at his work, it becomes apparent that influence from intellectual and natural aspects of the Outer Cape is a critical source of his success. Similar to his role models Edmund Wilson and Norman Mailer, Jencks is very much a Renaissance man with deep knowledge of arts, humanities, and sciences to support his writing. His focus on Post-Modernism as a broad and complex pluralistic imperative has diversity, tolerance, and social justice imbedded within it. His focus on the natural and cosmic realms of science reflects his respect for and care of the planet. These were values instilled by the intellectual, political, and natural environment of his youth in the paradise of the Outer Cape, and they created for him a strong basis to define, promulgate, and ultimately help establish Post-Modernism as a new, and better, architectural worldview. ▀

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CAPE ARCHITECTURE

By Christopher Kilbridge

HOW A HOUSE relates to the outdoors tells a lot about what its builders thought about nature. Antique Cape Cod houses, for example, seem like part of the natural order. Like Cape Cod itself, they are both delicate and hardy, evoking cultivated gardens and Yankee seafarers. Moreover, they seem conjured from memory itself, old, like the landscape, or primal, like a child's hieroglyph of a house. Spare in detail, steep-roofed, collaged with gray shingles and white clapboard, antique Capes are a bright symbol of purity against the green shadows of the pitch pine woods. From Hyannisport, Cape Cod, to Levittown, Long Island, the Cape house has become part of the American landscape mythology.

Yet the original Cape houses were hardly picturesque in conception. The same compact form that we admire for its simplicity is a clue to the Cape's austere origins. The builders of early Cape houses might find our romance with the vernacular landscape puzzling, for they built according to necessity. In Colonial times, when labor was scarce and sawmills few, building a house was difficult and costly. Therefore, simplicity was foremost in design. Only later were "ells" added and visitors entertained in a parlor rather than a bedroom. The modest form of the Cape House that we admire evolved from a careful use of resources in a harsh environment rather than from aesthetic restraint; these houses neither celebrated nature nor took part in it. If early Capes symbolized anything, it was title to the land and a commitment to turning it to productivity and profit.

Not surprisingly, Cape houses are inward looking. The Atwood-Higgins House in Wellfleet provides a good example. Built in 1730, it's one of the earliest Cape Cod houses still in existence. As a cross section shows, the framed structure of the house is the equivalent of a wooden tent enclosing a chimney. Built with vertical planks on a timber frame, the thin shell kept rain and wind out but barely contained heat. In contrast to the spare frame, the masonry chimney is a Baroque masterpiece. The careful workmanship required to build it reveals its vital necessity, while its twisting form expresses its existential meaning. Just as the house centered civilized life in the wilderness, its massive chimney, hollowed out for a variety of hearths and ovens, gathered domestic life around itself. This is evident, too, in the small rooms huddled around the center. In each, only the interior wall, surrounding the fireplace, is graced with paneling and festooned with the symbols of civilization: musket, lamps, and tableware. The small windows illuminating this wall afford only a narrow view of the outside. Verandas, porches, and balconies—appurtenances of the picturesque—played no part in the design. Though the Cape Cod house may seem natural, in its time it was a defense against the wilderness.

By the time Colonists were settling the Cape, Native peoples had been thriving in Eastern Massachusetts for thousands of years. They, too, made houses without views or verandas. Yet their dwellings related to the natural world in a way alien to Colonial builders. Whereas Cape houses anchored their owners to the land, *wetus* freed the Wampanoag from it. Light, flexible, easily expanded, and easily disassembled, *wetus* were built to suit the seasonal mobility upon which the Wampanoag depended. These dwellings were constructed by cutting saplings, planting their ends in the ground, and bending them toward each other to form a dome. Lashed together and covered with woven or bark mats, the *wetu* was assembled rapidly from a combination of local and reused materials. The mat cladding was adapted to the seasons, thin in the summer months and double walled in the winter to create an insulating cavity.

Given the Native lifestyle, it seems likely that the idea of building a house in nature was as irrelevant to Native Americans as it was to European settlers. For the Wampanoag, life was by definition lived outdoors—not on the land but across it. For these Native people, what we call nature was neither an untamed chaos nor an idyllic garden but a cyclical order of which they were a part. Their modes of dwelling reflected a spatial concept articulated by many homes, each with its own place in the seasonal succession. Consequently, Wampanoag peoples tended to minimize strict ownership of natural resources. Colonial division of the land among individuals was, for Native people, economically irrational and physically unsustainable. In the Wampanoag view, European settlement practices were cosmically wrongheaded.

Where does our current view of the Cape Cod landscape fit on the spectrum between continuity and fixed property? Again, both Wampanoag and Colonial people would probably find our views of nature sentimental and impractical. And though both altered the land they lived on, both might find the scale at which we routinely transform the land staggering. This exposes an odd dissonance in our contemporary view of nature. On present-day Cape Cod, shaped by tourism, leisure, and retirement, we harbor a deep ambivalence about the meaning of the environment. We tend to romanticize the landscape but treat land itself as a commodity. More to the point, the landscape, which is continuous, gives value to individual parcels, which, in turn, are controlled privately and traded as personal property.

The most interesting dwellings built on the Cape since the rise of the leisure economy are the ones that negotiate between the fixed and the cyclical, and between boundaries and the landscape. The Robert Corey House in Truro is one of these. Completed in 1968, the Corey House was one of several houses built on a small subdivision developed for vacation properties. At that time, buying land and building a summerhouse on the Cape was still manageable for people with a middle-class income. Perhaps



THE ROBERT COREY HOUSE

because of this, the houses in this neighborhood are small and efficiently designed, and prudently make use of the original terrain.

The Corey House, which overlooks the Pamet River Valley, consists of two parts. One is compact, rooted in the earth, anchored by a chimney, and prepared for cold weather. The other part hovers over the hillside on columns and contains seasonal guest rooms. The two parts are connected by a floating deck, which doubles as a carport. For a small house, it offers a wealth of experiences, many of which involve an intricate dialogue between interior spaces, views of the outdoors, and exterior spaces. Half-rooted and half-floating, the house brings to mind both Colonial and Native ideas about the land. The house is titled property—hardly mobile—and its two-story wing resembles old Capes both in its floor plan and in the scale of its living spaces. However, it sits lightly on the land and is seasonally flexible.

What most profoundly recalls Native sensibility—however distantly—is its denial of boundaries on the landscape. Following the driveway, the terrain flows down to and through the house. The numerous balconies project out over the valley, making visual connections to distant hills. A vertically framed, two-story glass wall reflects the interval of the pitch pine woods. Property edges are only vaguely discernible where bounded by quiet roads. Otherwise, the landscape flows on over the Cape's distinctive, intimate topography. Though fixed, the Corey House emphasizes the continuity of landscape rather than obstruct it. It's a sensibility shared by many house builders on the Outer Cape at that time.

Sadly, what was once a desire to build in nature, however romantically construed, has

transformed into a drive to own a piece of it and to maximize the value of ever-shrinking units of land. The result is more and bigger seasonal dwellings on smaller pieces of property and less space between them. No doubt this is due at least in part to the recent trend in residential

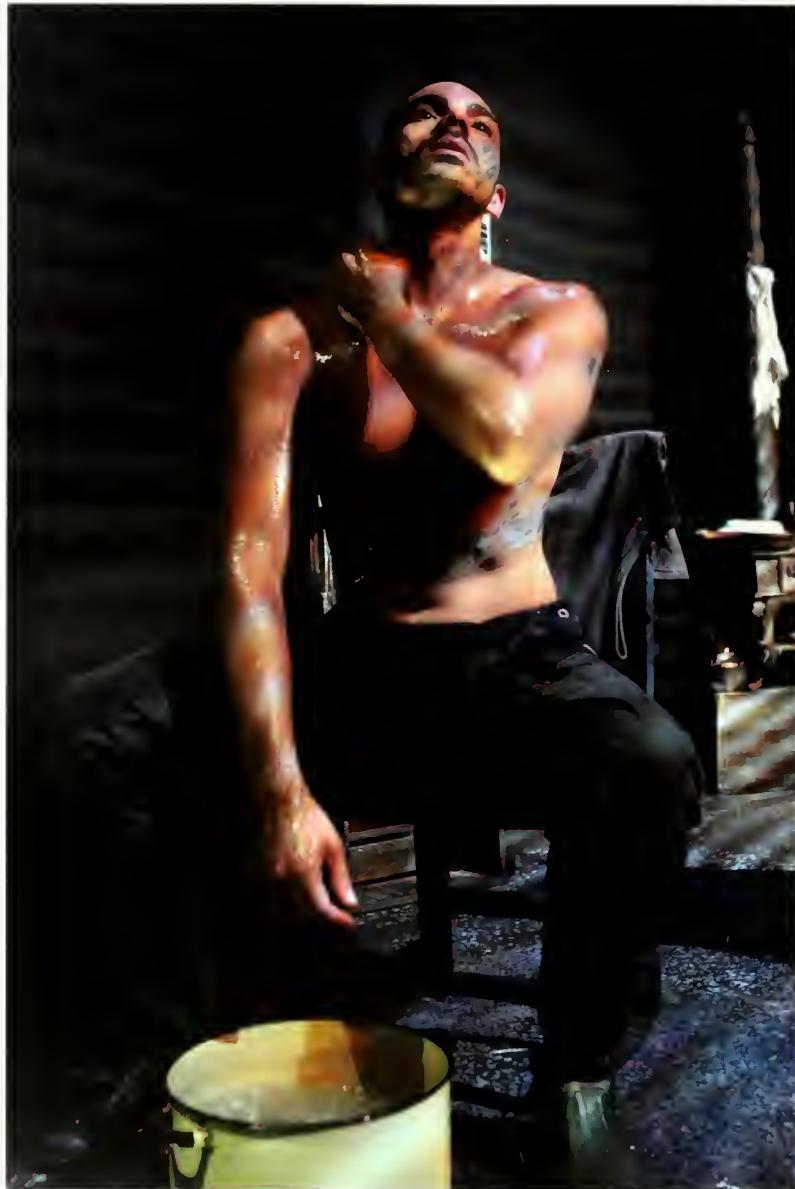
real-estate development in which ever-larger houses are built for smaller and smaller households. In the forty-five years since the Corey House was built, household size in the United States has decreased by roughly a third, while the average house size has doubled. By now, everyone has a tale to tell of a familiar ranch or colonial being torn down to accommodate a McMansion. On the Cape, the dangers of this approach are multiplied by the delicacy of the environment and the narrowness of the peninsula. Natural resources, particularly fresh water, are scarce and won't support wasteful expansion. Affordable housing is disappearing, forcing year-round workers to drive ever greater distances to build, maintain, protect, and govern Cape Cod's towns.

Where does this place us on the spectrum between continuity and carving up? Have we become so detached from the natural environment that the Cape landscape—the Cape Cod of collective memory—will soon be altered beyond recognition? How long will it be before the dream of owning a piece of the Cape is gone? As the Colonial Cape and Native American wetu tell us much about the lives of their creators, our buildings on Cape Cod, and management of the land, will create a profound and indelible legacy. □

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THE ATWOOD-HIGGINS HOUSE



Tennessee Williams, from Cape Town to Cape Cod and Back

By David Kaplan

FROM CAPE TOWN, South Africa, to the tip of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and back—and back again—the award-winning staging of Tennessee Williams's often-overlooked late play *Kingdom of Earth* from Abrahamse-Meyer Productions is a not-to-be-overlooked example of what the Tennessee Williams Festival in Provincetown means and does to act on its mission, to roll out Tennessee Williams's work into the world.

In late September 2012, the meeting hall of the musty P-town VFW on Highway 6 opened to the beat of Sam Chatmon's haunting Mississippi Delta blues song "I Have to Paint my Face":

Say God made us all
He made some at night
That's why he didn't take time
To make us all white

The sight of hypermasculine Marcel Meyer stripped to the waist, pouring water on himself, readies the audience to pay close attention to the entrance of Anthea Thompson in hot-pink, gingham Capri pants stretched over ample assets. She's playing Myrtle, an ex-stripper Prattling in a spot-on country-fried accent, mysteriously acquired 8,700 miles from the Mississippi Delta, where the play is set. Myrtle got married the day before to neurasthenic Lot, played with albino blonde perfection by Nicholas Dallas. Lot aims to have Myrtle set up home on his family farm, though he didn't bother to tell his new wife about his half-brother named Chicken, who lives on the place. That's Meyer as Chicken, glistening wet, listening to their arrival, feral.

A Boston-based critic described what it was like to be in the audience:

As directed by Fred Abrahamse, the play grabbed hold of your throat and slowly, purposefully, squeezed your breath away. . . . The effect was riveting. (Robert Israel, *Edge Magazine*)

The South African cast flew into Boston two days before their festival premiere, thanks to last-minute intercession to get the proper visas from America's Vice Consul in Cape Town, Collier F. Graham, who coincidentally hails from Clarksdale, Mississippi, where Tennessee Williams spent his boyhood. In a fortuitous Washington meeting between Robert Gips, US Ambassador to South Africa, and Ebrahim Rasool, South African Ambassador to the United States, the two diplomats discussed the hope that South African theater artists would bring a new point of view to a version of a play better and badly known as *The Seven Descents of Myrtle*.

Under that ungainly title, the play opened on Broadway the day after Williams's birthday in 1968 and closed after twenty-nine performances. The critics were baffled:

There is no rational explanation of *The Seven Descents of Myrtle* except that Tennessee Williams is burlesquing himself, if that is rational. Williams' exercises in southern degradation have sometimes illuminated the human condition, but this one is narrow, obsessively petty, and essentially ludicrous. (Edwin Newman, NBC News)

Forty-four years later, the South African production did bring a different perspective, in particular a sensitivity to the issues of race that underscore the play, something unnoticed in 1968, so distracted were Americans by the playwright's recently disclosed and unapologetic



PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER BLANK



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PHOTO BY JOSH ANDROS

(ABOVE FROM TOP) SCENES FROM *KINGDOM OF EARTH*: CHERRI GOLDEN AS MYRTLE AND ALEX ORSAK AS LOT IN THE COLUMBUS, MISSISSIPPI, PRODUCTION, 2013; DAVID TROTTER AS CHICKEN AND CHERRI GOLDEN AS MYRTLE IN THE COLUMBUS, MISSISSIPPI, PRODUCTION, 2013; MARCEL MEYER AS CHICKEN, ANTHEA THOMPSON AS MYRTLE, NICHOLAS DALLAS AS LOT IN THE PROVINCETOWN TENNESSEE WILLIAMS THEATER PRODUCTION, 2012

(OPPOSITE PAGE) MARCEL MEYER AS CHICKEN IN THE CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA, PRODUCTION, 2012

homosexuality. What was called burlesque—Williams's reconfiguration of his earlier themes under the light of his later experience—is now recognized as a widening of his vision as a creative artist. Knowing the Festival's enthusiasm for presenting adventurous work written by Williams, Tom Erhardt, the London-based theater agent who represents the Tennessee Williams estate, suggested that the Abrahamse-Meyer production premiere in Provincetown.

Critical theory aside, visceral enjoyment of the performances in Provincetown was undeniable. The run sold out. Home in Cape Town, South Africa, where it played next, the production was acclaimed. "The cast are, without exception, absolutely outstanding," said the *Cape Times*, commending the "terrible beauty" of the acting and pointing out that "the play is ultimately one of hope. It is a resounding affirmation of the power of love." The production was nominated for three Fleur du Cap Awards (the Cape Town

equivalent of the Tony). Anthea Thompson was nominated for best actress, Charl-Johan Lingenfelder for original score, and Fred Abrahamse won for the best set design.

The further resonance of the production is most impressive. Brenda Caradine, the executive director of the Columbus, Mississippi, Tennessee Williams Tribute, has been coming to Provincetown for each of the last eight years of the Tennessee Williams Festival. She was so moved by *Kingdom of Earth* that she had her own production of it staged this spring in Columbus—the small town where Williams was born. Echoing the Provincetown VFW, an old drugstore on the historic downtown Main Street was converted into an intimate theater. M. J. Etua directed, with Alex Orsak as Lot, Cherri Golden as Myrtle. A reviewer in Columbus extolled David Trotter in the role of Chicken:

[He] both dazzled and disturbed the audience. The honesty that defined the complexity of a man

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who is tormented by his own existence was felt throughout his entire performance. The subtleties of anger, hate, madness and shame permeated his performance. No emotions were left unaddressed. (Joseph St. John, in *This Is Real Media*)

Mississippi social mores are not Provincetown's. The play was controversial in Columbus, its impoliteness "disappointing," and e-mails circulated protesting Williams's "objectionable language." And this, too, the reviewer in Columbus took on:

Tennessee Williams was a man before his time . . . a true philosopher of the human condition. He did not mince his words as he dealt with the complex issues of race, sex, passion, heterosexuality, homosexuality and the Eros of humanity. . . . Some people may not like what Tennessee Williams had to say and that is their loss. Williams accomplished what all writers want to be: an artist who says, writes and does whatever he wants. In the end, he was the master of his own art.

Joe Paprzycki, the artistic director of the South Camden Theatre Company in New Jersey, also comes to the Tennessee Williams Festival in Provincetown every year. His productions of Williams's plays *Suddenly Last Summer* and *The Night of the Iguana* have brought his company great reviews. A production of *Kingdom of Earth*, directed by Connie Norwood, opens the 2013 season in Camden, starting October 11. Paprzycki explained: "I knew

about the play before, and had probably read it, maybe even more than once, but seeing it was something else. Seeing it at the festival inspired me to produce it."

The genesis of these inspired connections began seven years ago, in December 2006, when a small group of people gathered in Boston to draw up a mission statement for the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Festival. Present in the room: Alix Ritchie, Jerry Scally, Patrick Falco, and this writer, along with P. J. Layng, Maureen Shea, and Gail Phaneuf. The agreed-on goals: to celebrate Williams's work and connection to Provincetown, but also to send the spirit—"searching spirit," Alix Ritchie suggested—rolling forward out of the Cape and back. That is what has happened with numerous plays shown at the Festival, *Kingdom of Earth* among them.

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The 2013 theme for the Festival is *Tennessee Williams and Women*, seven plays by Williams ranging from the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* to a self-described "slapstick tragedy," *The Mutilated*, starring avant-garde goddesses Mink Stole and Penny Arcade. Also on the bill: Williams's plays from the 1930s in which burlesque chorus girls have prominent roles, written when the playwright was still Tom, not yet Tennessee. As challenging in their own way as Williams's later plays, the chorus-girl plays tap into the roots of love and cynicism displayed by the former chorines who play leading roles in Williams's *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* and *Kingdom of Earth*.

For those who missed it last year, the original South African cast returns to Provincetown to play *Kingdom of Earth* for two weeks at the Provincetown Theater, a production sponsored by Berta Walker Gallery, starting September 12 and then on into the Festival week. This is part of a lineup of seven Williams plays (along with some Gertrude Stein and Susan Glaspell) running September 26–29 in venues throughout town. ▀

DAVID KAPLAN is the curator and a cofounder of the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival and author of the book *Tennessee Williams in Provincetown*. More information about festival activities is available at twptown.org.

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Marshall McLuhan,

WHAT WERE YOU DOIN'?



The media-theory pioneer who inspired and perplexed a generation is more relevant today than ever.

By Howard Karren

IT'S A CLASSIC Woody Allen moment: As Alvy Singer, the cranky intellectual at the center of *Annie Hall*, Allen is waiting in line in the lobby of a Manhattan art-house cinema, listening with increasing irritation to a pompous, pretentious man blather on about Marshall McLuhan.

"What I would give for a large sock with horse manure in it," Alvy says, speaking directly to the camera (that is: to us, the audience). "What do you do when you get stuck on a movie line with a guy like this behind you?"

He turns to the offender in question: "And the funny part of it is, you don't know *anything* about Marshall McLuhan's work."

"Oh, really?" the man retorts. "I happen to teach a class at Columbia called 'TV, Media, and Culture.' So I think that my insights into Mr. McLuhan have a great deal of validity."

"Oh, do you?" Alvy snaps back. "Well, that's funny, because I happen to have Mr. McLuhan right here. . . ." And true to his word, Alvy pulls the real Marshall McLuhan from across the lobby and says, "Tell him."

"I heard what you were saying," McLuhan obligingly tells the man. "You know *nothing* of my work. . . . How you ever got to teach a course in anything is totally amazing!"

"Boy," Alvy says to the camera, victorious yet unsatisfied, "if life were only like this."

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If only it were. Back in 1977, when *Annie Hall* was released, many people had no idea what Marshall McLuhan actually meant in his writings, and his reputation for being abstruse had been building for some time. Tom Wolfe, a journalist who could sniff out hypocrisy and social terror among the culturati and privileged classes faster and more accurately than anyone, wrote an essay about McLuhan in 1965, more than a decade earlier, sardonically entitled "What If He Is Right?" At that time, McLuhan, an obscure Canadian academic whose book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* had just been published, was being paid handsomely to speak to execs at GE and other high-tech corporations about his ideas, and Wolfe was there to report on it. The

(ABOVE) THE MIRROR CRACK'D: MARSHALL MCCLUHAN, CIRCA 1967, IS EERILY COMFORTABLE POSING AMONG TELEVISED IMAGES OF HIMSELF, ONCE REMOVED.
BERNARD GOTFRYD/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES



WOODY ALLEN BREAKS THROUGH THE FOURTH WALL WITH A WEAPONIZED MCCLUHAN IN ANNIE HALL (1977). "IF LIFE WERE ONLY LIKE THIS," ALLEN SAYS REGRETFULLY AT SCENE'S END. UNITED ARTISTS/20TH CENTURY FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT

media we use in our everyday life, McLuhan told these masters of the universe, are themselves "the message," and not the information they carry. They are metaphorical extensions of our bodies, our senses, and our brains, and through our use of them, they shape the world we inhabit and how we perceive it. We, as a society, were transformed hundreds of years ago by the printing press and mass literacy from an oral, tribal culture to a visual, linear one; it gave us—to put it in McLuhanese—"an eye for an ear." The medium of television, he told his listeners, is now transforming us back again into an oral culture.

McLuhan talked about "hot" media (like film) and "cool" media (like TV), and about the "global village" (his coinage) that TV creates by spanning the earth with electronic immediacy. And he also made some far-out claims, such as tracing the popularity of fishnet stockings to the low-resolution video image of the television screen. Huh? The executives started to sweat. They didn't understand what McLuhan was talking about, but they nevertheless suspected he was onto something. Insecure, highly paid suits hate not being in control of a situation, especially one that they themselves created. And so they wondered, and worried: What if he is right?

Wolfe's essay was included in a collection that was published as *The Pump House Gang* in 1968. In the early '70s, when I was in high school and attracted to the neon-pink cover of the paperback edition of the book, I read "What If He Is Right?" and so began a lifelong pursuit of media studies. There were many of us who started getting interested in media from an analytical and structuralist point of view at that time. And there were many Americans, whether they were movers and shakers or intellectuals or just ordinary folk, who looked at modern media with dread. So much in American culture was in tumult during the Vietnam War era that it was only natural for people to seek out a scapegoat, and television, which had snowballed into a ubiquitous fixture in every household and had become the dominant pastime of virtually every

age group, was a convenient target of cultural paranoia.

Marshall McLuhan was the lightning rod for some of that angst. On *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In*, the quintessential late-'60s-early-'70s TV comedy-variety show, cast member Henry Gibson perfectly encapsulated what the people watching at home were feeling when he held an oversized fake flower, stared straight into the camera, and recited one of his silly little rhyming poems: "Marshall McLuhan / What're ya doin'?" What McLuhan was doing was sometimes irresponsible, often inspired and insightful, and, as we have seen in the decades that followed his death in 1980, surprisingly prophetic. Today, at a time when the Internet and Facebook and Twitter and iPads and smartphones and Skype conversations and text-messaging have collectively replaced television as the medium of the moment and the catalyst of cultural change, McLuhan's concepts continue to haunt us.

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In one important way, McLuhan was misdirected in his thinking about television. He placed a lot of perceptual importance on the low resolution of the video image. The fact that our brains had to put together the minuscule dots of light on a TV screen into a cohesive image made television

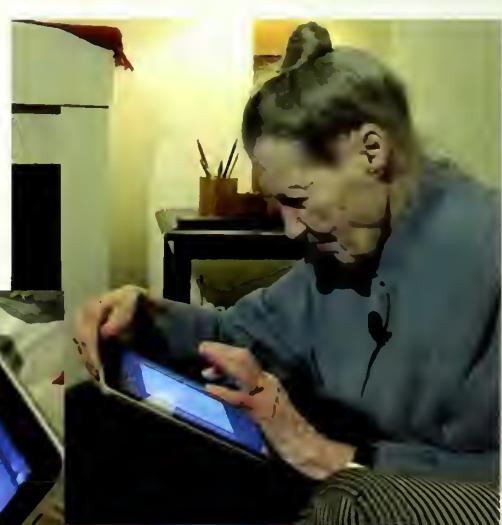
a "cool" medium in his eyes: it required our participation. Film, on the other hand, was explosively detailed and presented a completed spectacle before us: film was "hot"—it directed and controlled our senses. Comic books, which are colored in a printing process that closely parallels the dots of light on a television screen, were similarly categorized as "cool."

There's a consistent logic to this, and the way we watch television is substantially different from the way we watch movies in theaters. But the resolution of the image isn't the key reason, especially today. High-definition digital technology has erased the difference in resolution between film and video images, yet the cultural pattern begun by the medium of television hasn't changed. If anything, the "cool" aspects of television have gone icy cold in the world of portable telephone-computers and social-network websites. What made television truly "cool" was something that McLuhan had suggested without fully realizing that it was the crux of the issue: interactivity.

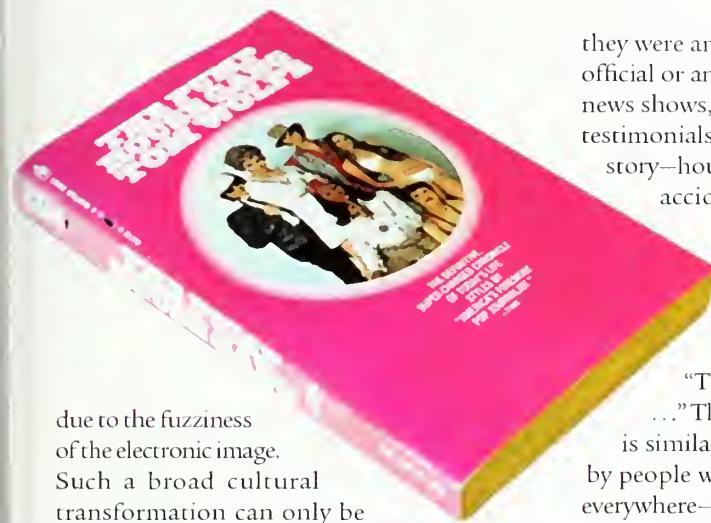
Television has commercial breaks, a choice of channels, the privacy of home. Theatrical movies are the opposite: they dictate the conditions under which you can watch them, and they must be seen in public, with the accompanying rules (don't talk; shut off your phone). The interactivity of television has grown exponentially over the years. There are now hundreds, even thousands, of channels; remote controls have made channel-surfing a sport; and DVRs (digital video recorders, popularized by TiVo) allow a viewer to ignore scheduled showtimes, skip through ads, and create his or her own instant replays. Television laid most of the groundwork for the ultimate expression of interactivity—the Internet—by electronically interconnecting us (wirelessly at first; now via cable). But the resurrection of oral, tribal culture by electronic media, which McLuhan's theories forced us to recognize, wasn't



MEDIA ARE EXTENSIONS OF OUR PHYSICAL SELVES, MCCLUHAN THEORIZED. INTELLIGENT TOUCH



DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR CHILDREN ARE? GROWING UP CYBER-CONNECTED. ENCU/Flickr



due to the fuzziness of the electronic image. Such a broad cultural transformation can only be effected by changes in behavior and practice.

McLuhan understood this, but he was hung up on his eye-for-an-ear metaphor. He loved to cite hidden structures in media, and it's certainly true that the human brain invents much of what we see based on what it supposes should be there. The notion of media brainwashing was a trendy sort of paranoid concept during the postwar era (a case in point: Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders*, in 1957, an exposé of manipulations of the unconscious mind by advertisers). Filling in the gaps in our perceptions is the basis for most optical illusions, which have the feel of a magic trick to them—and hocus-pocus types of pronouncements (remember fishnet stockings?) were one of McLuhan's weaknesses. But in the grand scheme of things, there's not a whole lot that's hidden about interactivity.

And the effects it has had on our culture today are blatant. Television programming, for example, has become compulsively interactive. Consider the role of the testimonial in TV news. At one time, testimonials were limited to people who actually had some expertise on a subject, whether

they were an eyewitness to a crime or a public official or an informed spokesperson. On local news shows, for which budgets are often tight, testimonials are now recorded for nearly every

story—house fire, sexual assault, hit-and-run accident—and the people interviewed often have no particular knowledge of the victim or perpetrator. They simply "react" to the fact of what happened: "Gee, I no longer feel safe in this neighborhood," or "They seemed like a nice family to me."

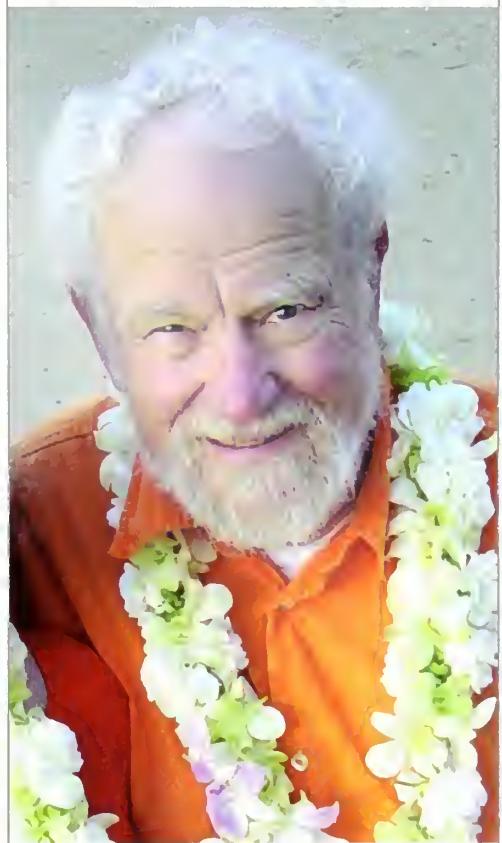
... This kind of open-forum commenting is similar to posts on a blog. Testimonials by people without any special knowledge are everywhere—even in comedy skits on late night talk shows. Testimonials are a form of personal input into the medium, and the need to show them and consume them has become a staple of the new oral culture. Television has become more of a conversation than a display of talent.

Expertise is denigrated in the new oral culture; there is a kind of democratization of knowledge and of the validity of opinions. In a world in which everybody can comment on anything, standards become far more relative. Everyone has become a critic of the arts, and the role of professional critics has waned. Judges on "reality" TV contests are not enough: the public itself must vote on who sings the best or dances the best or who is the MVP of an episode of *Survivor*. Political polls (what *we* think) have become as important as—or more important than—actual policy (what experts think). And this process of democratization of information is especially true online, where many databases are public and Wikipedia is free and user-generated.

The "global village" of electronic media that McLuhan had heralded has become more and more vivid as the technology has evolved. The use of e-mail and text messages, cell phones, cell-phone photography, smartphones, and tablets, and, most of all, social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, has made events anywhere across the globe immediately accessible to anyone and everyone. If reporters are banned from an uprising, ordinary people on the street use cell phones to report on what's happening, and the news spreads instantly and globally through online networking. It's quite possible that a popular uprising such as the Arab Spring would not have happened without these media. With compulsively up-to-the-minute tweets on Twitter, events no longer happen in real time—they happen in virtual time.

Global interactivity is so extensive, it's easy to forget that it consists of virtual media connections and that much of the perceptual information is actually missing. It has become a "cool" world indeed. It is curious to note that McLuhan also coined the use of the word "surf" to refer to the way people use media, and he hinted at media-related services in the future that sounded a lot like what the Internet has become. McLuhan may have been more of a mystic than a scientist, but his crystal ball has proved remarkably accurate.

What thou lovest well remains, the rest is dross.

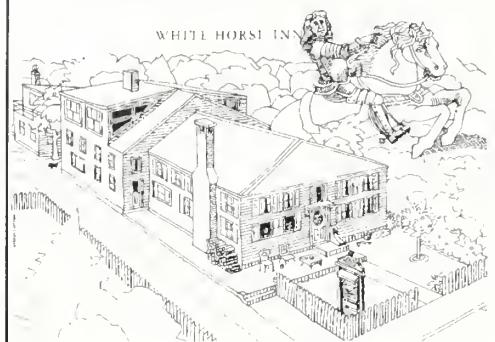


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(ABOVE) HENRY GIBSON RECITES A RHYME ON NBC'S ZEITGEIST COMEDY SERIES, *ROWAN & MARTIN'S LAUGH-IN* (1967-73)
WARNER BROS. TELEVISION/NBC

(TOP) THE PINK BANTAM BOOKS 1969 PAPERBACK EDITION OF TOM WOLFE'S *THE PUMP HOUSE GANG* INCLUDED HIS MCCLUHAN PIECE, "WHAT IF HE IS RIGHT?" ilovefuzz.com



THE EYE OF THE UBIQUITOUS SMARTPHONE RECORDS THE NEWS. © ARIEL ZAMBELICH/WIRED

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"All media," McLuhan wrote, "are extensions of some human faculty—psychic or physical." The discovery of the wheel, for example, was an extension of the foot: it got us places faster. But what is Facebook an extension of? The "social" aspect of online networks is so contradictory—as much as they bring people together, they are terrifically isolating. Facebook doesn't actually replicate a social gathering; it creates a synthesized plane of social reality. It's about the need for intimacy, family, a tribal identity, a cure for loneliness . . . yet it's practiced alone. I wish I could pull Marshall McLuhan out from nowhere, just as Aly Singer did—not to negate the discussion but to create a metaphor that pulls it all together. But, sadly, I think we're still as confused as those folks back in the '70s. ☒

HOWARD KARREN studied semiotics at Brown, got his MFA at Columbia's film school, and worked as an editor at Premiere Magazine for thirteen years. He is currently the manager of the Waters Edge Cinema, writes a regular column of DVD reviews for the Banner, and co-owns the Alden Gallery in Provincetown.

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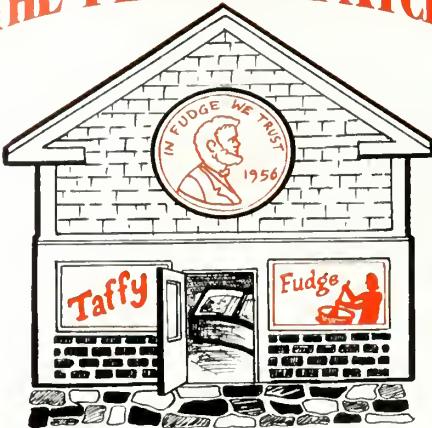
Carnival on Commercial Street

By Steve Desroches

HERE IS ALWAYS a day, sometime in the bleakest part of winter, that I walk alone along Commercial Street and notice a strand or two of Mardi Gras beads hanging from a naked branch or tangled in a jumble of electric power lines. Echoes of summer, when Provincetown is jammed full of people. A sparkly flash of fuchsia or silver on a gray winter's day brings to life the voices of the thousands of revelers that line the parade route for the annual Carnival each August. Provincetown is full of ghosts that way, tongue-in-cheek reminders of days past. The passing of years, or just a few distant months, makes all the difference when it comes to weather and temperament, not to mention population.

Carnival is one of my favorite times of year in Provincetown. And I've made it a winter tradition that on the day I spot a strand of beads that was meant for eager outstretched hands but instead landed out of reach in the gutter of Spiritus Pizza or in the chestnut tree outside the UU Meeting House, I begin to plan my costume for that year's parade day. I call it Sequin Day, a private holiday all my own to brighten my spirits in the dark and desolate days of a winter in Provincetown. However, when I look around in the summer at the thousands that come each year for Carnival, I know that I am clearly not the only one who begins to get ready in February for August's Carnival.

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Though it started as a tiny happening sponsored by the Provincetown Business Guild in 1978 to boost business in an otherwise stubbornly sleepy late-summer week, Carnival is now the biggest event of the year in Provincetown, capped by the arrival of 100,000 people coming to town just to see the parade. Indeed, Provincetown loves a party. Be it the Blessing of the Fleet, the Fourth of July fireworks, or the tradition of the Beaux Arts Balls, celebrations become a work of art in Provincetown as a unique expression of the town's unique culture. Perhaps that is why Carnival is so popular thirty-five years later. While the Provincetown Business Guild is focused on marketing the town to the LGBT community, Carnival has grown into an event that casts a wider net. It beautifully melds together the artistic heritage of Provincetown with gay and lesbian culture along with the dedication to diversity for which the town has become so famous.

Consider this. Last February, not long after Sequin Day, mind you, I was in my hometown of Taunton, Massachusetts, for the closing of my grandmother's house as she moved here to Provincetown to live closer to my partner, Peter, and me. The basement of the registry of deeds downtown looks and feels like a time warp as the 1930s architecture has been so well maintained, not because of historic preservation efforts, but

because decades of budget cuts prevented any renovations. Polite chitchat between me, the two realtors, the new buyer, and the lawyer overseeing the transaction gave way to talk of where I was from. The familiar chorus of "Oh, I love Provincetown" was soon followed by more sincere examples of why they loved the town at the tip of Cape Cod. And soon that chorus fell into harmony as each of these people (who, based on my safe assumptions from the information provided thus far, were all heterosexual, all over the age of fifty, and included at least two Republicans) spoke about their affection for the Carnival parade with childlike effervescence.

All had stumbled upon the parade by accident, or at least without much understanding as to what the event was, before they came to town from wherever else they were staying on the Cape. But all were mesmerized and completely enchanted.

"That parade IS Provincetown," said one realtor. "It's everything I love about the town wrapped into one day."

Indeed it is. Wild. Accepting. Fun. Creative. Over the top. For everyone.

Cities all over the world have annual events that define them to the rest of the world. New Orleans has Mardi Gras. Rio de Janeiro has



ALL PHOTOS BY DAN McKEON

Carnival. To the chagrin of animal-rights activists, Pamplona has the Running of the Bulls. Tiny Anoka, Minnesota, has the country's oldest and most famous Halloween Parade. Carnival is Provincetown's. I've always assumed that the event is only celebrated by a portion of the gay community and maybe the general population in southern New England. At least, that was what I thought until Sequin Day five years ago. That year, I decided it was time to step up my costume. In the past, my Carnival parade day costume would be composed of borrowed gowns and scraps of sparkly this-and-that I had accumulated from costumes I'd worn to Gold Dust Orphan soirees or John Dowd's Fourth of July parties. Scouring the Internet, I found an old-school bordello madam costume that would fit the 2008 theme of "The Wild, Wild West" perfectly. Thanks to the technological revolution, the world is much smaller, and I ordered the custom-made outfit directly from the manufacturer in Thailand, reducing the cost significantly from what it would have been in the States. A representative from the company wrote to me asking about specifics on size, color, and cut. But I was shocked by her next question.

"Do you know Thirsty Burlington?"

Of course I knew Thirsty. Everyone in

Provincetown knows Thirsty as one of our beloved, hometown drag queens. How did this woman in Bangkok know her? Turns out she had made several outfits for Thirsty. In our back-and-forth e-mails, this woman in Thailand wrote, "This costume must be for your Carnival in Provincetown." How did she know about Carnival?! She explained that she does a lot of business with people looking for costumes for Provincetown Carnival. She has a manufacturing calendar on her office wall with the dates of events such as London Pride, Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, and, yes, even Provincetown Carnival. Now every Sequin Day begins with an e-mail to Bangkok and ends with pad thai for dinner in honor of the folks who make my fabulous outfits each year.

Thirty-five might seem like an odd anniversary to make a big deal about. After all, birthdays that end in zero always seem to be a much bigger deal, at least after passing twenty-five. But Carnival has not just grown, it has flourished. And each and every year is worth celebrating. ☀

STEVE DESROCHES is a writer and journalist and is the staff writer for Provincetown Magazine. He lives in Provincetown with his partner, singer-songwriter Peter Donnelly. This year Steve will be "Lady Luck" in keeping with the "Viva Las Vegas" theme of Carnival 2013.

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VARUJAN BOGHOSIAN, *Two Pears*, 2012, collage, 18 3/4 X 22 3/8" framed

ELSPETH HALVORSEN,
Egg Moon Bridge,
2003, box construction,
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ED GIOBBI, *With Flowers*, 2010,
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SKY POWER, *Ebb Tide*, 2012, oil on canvas, 60 x 72"

6/21 - 7/14

SKY POWER Landscape Spirit recent paintings

Provincetown Masters: "On The Road" mixed media group ex.

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MOFFETT, RESIKA, WEINRICH**



PAUL RESIKA, *Fayence Through the Trees*,
1991, oil on canvas, 18 1 1/4 X 25 5/8"

ROMOLO DEL DEO

Maquettes for Outdoor Sculpture Commissions



ROBERT HENRY, *Above and Below*, 2012,
oil on canvas, 60 x 40"

7/19 - 8/11

ROBERT HENRY *It all Started With...*
large-scale paintings and gouaches
JUDYTH KATZ *Patterns in Pastel*
SALVATORE DEL DEO *Cape Vignettes*
small paintings

SPECIAL EVENT

Friday, 6/28 • 7 - 9 pm

Unveiling of **ROMOLO DEL DEO'S** Maquette
"Provincetown Fishermen's Memorial Sculpture"



ROMOLO DEL DEO, sketch for
"Study for Fishermen's Memorial"
charcoal, 40 1/2 x 28 1/2"



HERMAN MARIL,
Still Life With Sunflower,
1975, oil on canvas, 29 x 14"

8/16 - 9/8

HERMAN MARIL

Activity by the Sea paintings and drawings

MURRAY ZIMILES

Movement and Light paintings and pastels

9/13 - 10/6

FALL FLING

Figures, Faces, Fun, Fantasy
Mixed media gallery group ex.



SALVATORE DEL DEO,
Frenchie's Shack, oil on canvas,
8 X 10"



JUDYTH KATZ, *Peaks at Zion, I*, 1998,
acrylic, oil pastel on paper, 22 x 30"



MURRAY ZIMILES, *Purple Hills*, 2007, mixed media ink and pastel on paper, 19 1/2 x 39"



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